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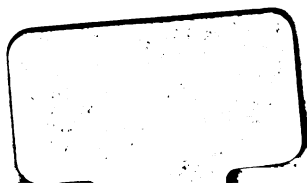
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LOVE AND LABOUR;
OR,
WORK AND ITS REWARD.

BY KATE PYER,
AUTHOR OF "PEACE STORIES FOR CHILDREN," ETC.

" Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the beauteous land.
Little deeds of kindness,
Little words of love,
Make our earth an Eden,
Like to that above."

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CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER.

" Oh ! my clothes are all ragged and tattered and torn,
I wander alone quite unfriended—forlorn ;
On my shelterless head the bleak winter winds blow,
And my poor naked feet are benumbed in the snow ;
No bright blazing fire, with its comforts, I see,
Surrounded with faces all shining with glee.
Ah ! no, the cold street, now deserted and wild,
Is the only home left for the drunkard's child ! "

It was the close of a hot summer's day. Evening shadows were creeping gently over the earth, as a troop of boys came rollicking through a dusty lane near the town of D——. Peals of laughter every now and then shook the still air, as some rude jest escaped the lips of one and another, while clouds of dust, raised by the shuffling manner of their tread, on all sides surrounded them. Bunches of wild hedge flowers, or bunches of the ash, elders and oak, were carried in their hands, or swayed to and fro as they passed along. It was easy to see they were returning from a country stroll; one which the confined air of the courts, and crowded rooms of their parents' homes, made all the more pleasant and enjoyable. A turn in the lane brought into view a little girl, sitting on a bank by the road-side, weeping bitterly.

"What are you crying for?" said the foremost of the party. The child looked up with a vacant stare, and burst into a fresh flood of tears.

"Leave the stupid little thing alone," said another

of the boys, "and come along; ain't she got a tongue of her own?"

"Perhaps not, so lend her your'n," said another; and a loud laugh followed this speech, which was intended, or thought to be, a bit of boyish wit.

George Ashton, however, the first speaker, possessing more feeling than some of the others, lingered behind, and going up to the child again spoke—"What's the matter? Won't you tell me why you are crying?"

"Mother have beat me so," sobbed out the child, "so I've run away."

"Where do you live," said George.

"Down Blossom's Court."

"Oh, I know. Here," taking her hand, "I'll lead you home."

"Oh, no, no. I can't, I won't go," screamed out the child, as she tried with all her might to free herself from his grasp.

"But you can't stay here all night, and its getting dark."

"I ain't afraid; mother's so cross, she's worse than the darkness."

Ah! sad admission from the lips of a little child; but to how many a wretched, unmotherly woman

might not such words be applied. Thank God for the guardian angels of these outcast little ones, who do "always behold the face of their Father who is in heaven."

George's entreaties were unavailing. The child only sobbed and cried the more at every fresh attempt to take her home. He could not find it in his heart to leave her there, alone in the hush of night, with only the quiet stars for company. So, not knowing what else to do, he at length proposed her going with him. To this she consented; and as they slowly wended their way through the now brilliantly-lighted streets, her sobs became fainter and fainter, till by the time they had reached George's home they had entirely ceased, and the little storm-tossed spirit was at rest.

"Who've you got there?" said a gruff voice as they stepped inside the door.

"'Tis a little girl, father, that I found crying in Greenpond's lane. She says that her mother beat her so, I can't get her to go home."

"But she must go; we can't have her here. Who's to keep her, and where's she to sleep, in the name of fortune?"

"She can have my bed, father! I'll sleep on the floor for once."

"You'll do no such thing. Where does the little baggage come from?"

Here the wife, in a much gentler tone, asked the child her name, and where she lived—

"Esther Robins, and we lives in Blossom's Court ; but don't send me away, please don't ;" and she burst into a fresh torrent of tears, as she sobbed out, "mother'll kill me, I know she will. I daren't go home."

"Well, well, dry up your eyes, my poor child," said the kind-hearted woman, as she took up a corner of Esther's pinafore, and wiped them away. "We'll see what we can do for to-night at all events." Then turning to her husband, "'Tis a long way to Blossom's Court, Tom ; we can't send the child there to-night. I'll make up a bed, somehow, and to-morrow I'll try and find out her mother."

Tom's pipe had softened him down a little, for as he took one or two more whiffs he simply replied, "Well Jane, I hope you'll not find yourself a fool for your pains."

In less than a hour the little troubled one was soundly sleeping in a roughly-made up bed across two chairs—so lightly do the griefs of children weigh upon the heart.

CHAPTER II.

ESTHER'S MOTHER.

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they *may* forget."

Mrs. ASHTON was stirring betimes ; her husband had taken his early breakfast, and gone to his work, and the children's breakfast was nearly ready. "Come, come, little girl," said her kind, cheering, voice, "'tis time to get up ; here's a bowl of nice water to wash in, and see how the sunbeams are sparkling like di'monds on the top." Mrs. Ashton had placed it on a stool near the window, where the early rays of the sun came to pay a morning visit, even to her humble abode. "Mary," said she, "shall come and help you to dress." This was her daughter, somewhat about Esther's age, or it may be a few months older. She did not come very willingly to do her mother's bidding, and did not look very kindly on the little stranger.

"Who brought you here, I wonder," were her first words.

"Your brother."

"Just like his impudence. Mother has enough to do without having the likes of you to care for, I can tell 'ee. How long be 'e goin' to stay?"

"I don't know. But don't talk so to me—please don't"—and tears again flooded the eyes of the little suppliant.

"There, don't cry," said Mary, in a more softened tone, though her heart was still full of bitter, jealous feeling against the child. Mary had not yet learnt to copy the blessed Saviour, who never spoke to the sorrowful and distressed but in tones of tenderness and love.

As they entered the kitchen, which opened from the sleeping room, George looked up with a smile, and, beckoning to Esther, said—"Here, there's room by me:" at the same time busying himself to see her wants supplied. The bread and milk was soon despatched, and then, looking up at the clock—"Mother," said he, "it's time I was off." "Yes, my son." A short pause followed—a look of sympathy and interest fell on the little stranger—"Mother, don't take Esther away before I'm back from work."

"But I must, George, what will her mother do? she'll think her's lost."

"I don't think her mother cares much about her, if she beats her so cruelly."

"I fear not." And Mrs. Ashton could have added

her reasons for this thought ; but she kept them, for the present, in the silence of her own heart.

Before leaving the table, a few minutes were given to repeating a verse of Scripture, which each had chosen for themselves. George's was—"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me." (Matt. xxv. 40.) A loving look and quiet smile from his mother, showed that she understood his motive, and approved his choice. That smile was a sunbeam which followed him through the day, checking many an evil thought and angry word, and helping him to get through his work in a cheerful, happy spirit.

The little girls cleared away the breakfast things, while Mrs. Ashton made arrangements for her husband's dinner, which Mary was to take to him, and soon after set off with her young charge. Esther did not seem willing to go ; but Mrs. Ashton mildly, yet firmly told her what was her duty, and the little girl was just old enough to understand that her new friends were not well able to keep her. They passed through many busy, noisy streets, and, at length, turned up a narrower one, at the corner of which stood a large "gin-palace," as they are commonly called. It was adorned with plate glass

windows, handsome brass rods, and swinging doors ; with brilliant gas lamps, which, at night, threw a lurid glare across the street ; but from within came—oh ! such horrid sounds of wild, rude laughter, angry, passionate words, cursing and swearing, and all the suffocating stench of heated breath, and life-destroying liquids. Mrs. Ashton was hurrying past, as she always did such dens of iniquity, when a woman tottered out, in a state of partial intoxication.

“There’s mother. That’s my mother,” said Esther, clinging to Mrs. Ashton’s gown, and pointing to the poor, deluded woman just referred to.

“Never ! Oh ! my poor child,” was the sorrowful exclamation.

Esther was right. A few steps more brought them to Blossom’s Court ; and going to the door which the child pointed out, they found it fastened. “Who’m be you looking for ? Why, law’s me, here’s Hettie come back !” This exclamation, uttered rather loudly, brought several of the neighbours to their doors, from whom Mrs. Ashton soon learnt that, on the previous afternoon, Esther’s mother came home in a drunken state, and, finding the fire out, and no tea ready, had beaten the child most severely. Her screams being heard, one or two of the neighbours

ventured to interfere; and it was during the few minutes which were thus occupied, that the poor little trembling creature had slipped away.

The kind, motherly heart of Mrs. Ashton was greatly moved. Esther's pleading voice—"Do let me go back and live with you—I'll work very hard, and won't eat much either—but don't leave me here, dear, good Mrs. Ashton"—while the tears streamed down her pale, thin cheeks, were enough to melt a heart of stone. What could she do? There were others to consult, and to be thought of, and there was a secret darker and deeper than ought else, which made her hesitate.

While turning the matter over in her mind, the grating of a key was heard in the adjoining doorway, and soon after a haggard face looked into the room where they were sitting—"Have ye heard anything of my"—but before she had finished the sentence, her eye had caught sight of the object of her inquiry—"Why, you little hussy, here you are, are you?" and, with a face full of rage and passion, she stretched out her hand to seize the child. This Mrs. Ashton prevented, while, in a calm voice, she tried to soothe the angry woman before her. It was all in vain. Abuse, and cruel threats of taking the child's life,

if once in her power, was all the return she got. After storming away for some time, the wretched woman seemed, at last, exhausted, and suffered herself to be led away by two neighbours into her own dwelling.

Esther, trembling with affright, had been sheltering herself, as much as possible, behind her kind protector, to whom she clung with great pertinacity. "Poor little lamb," said Mrs. Ashton, stooping down to kiss her still tear-wet cheek :—then turning to the woman in whose apartment this distressing scene had taken place, she inquired, "Is this poor creature often as bad as this?"

"Well, may be, once a month or so."

"Kind to her child when sober?"

"Not very, even then ; I've often pitied the little dear, and more than once or twice she has slept with Ned and me, when I feared her mother was too drunk to take care of her."

"Is she a widow?"

"I thinks not. I've heard tell that her husband wouldn't live with her; but allows her something for support—but how far its true, can't say."

"Well, this drink is a dreadful curse," said Mrs. Ashton, with a sigh that told it's own tale.

"Ah! sure," responded the other, "my Ned is as good and kind a man as can be when the drink isn't in him." There was an echo in Mrs. Ashton's heart, but she kept down its utterance.

"And now what's to be done, Esther?"

"Oh! take me, do, do take me with you," said the child, with increasing earnestness.

"I'd offer to take her myself, but its poor times with us. Ned was out of work till just lately—and then her mother would soon know her was here—and I'm really afeard what she might do." No further argument was needed. Mrs. Ashton felt the child could not be left under such circumstances. Half dreading her husband's anger, yet trusting to some unknown source of help, she thoughtfully retraced her steps to her own dwelling.

Such was Esther's mother—by no means an uncommon example. Thank God, dear little happy children, however poor you may be, if you have escaped that greatest of all curses, of having a drunken father, or a drunken mother. Pity those who are not so richly blessed, and do something for their help and rescue. We'll show you how.

CHAPTER III.

THE RETURN.

**"Eloquent the children's faces !
Poverty's lean look which saith,
Save us ! save us ! woe surrounds us ;
Little knowledge sore confounds us ;
Life is but a lingering death !"**

DIDN'T George's eyes sparkle with delight, when, returning from his work, he found Esther sitting on a stool by his mother's side, busy sewing. And don't you think he was pleased when he found she was doing it for him? His mother had fitted her an easy bit of hemming on a shirt that she was mending; so the little girl soon tried to make herself useful, her bright eyes and busy fingers speaking the thanks of her young heart.

Mary's ill-humour was gone, and to make up for her rudeness in the morning, she came soon after and asked if Esther might go out with her, to call on one of her school-fellows. Permission was granted, and this gave George an opportunity of asking his mother all about her morning's adventure. The details grieved him sadly. He was a steady, thoughtful lad of about twelve or thirteen years, a great comfort to his mother, especially under her own heart-trouble, which she could not conceal from every eye, and certainly not from his.

"But what did father say to your bringing her back?"

Tom Ashton had been home to his six o'clock tea after work, and was gone out again—possibly to some club, or, as was too often the case, to the public-house.

"He didn't much like it," said Mrs. Ashton, in reply to George's inquiry, "but when I told him I would try and find out who her friends were, and perhaps get something allowed me to keep her, he said no more."

"I wish I could pay for her, mother. She seems a nice little girl, doesn't she?"

"Yes dear, there's something about her I like. I fancy, too, she's been better off than we poor folks; she seems so fair and feeling like, and she tells me she can read and write a little."

"Perhaps she has been to school."

"I think she has."

George was employed as an errand-boy in a grocer's shop, for which he got half-a-crown a week, and his food during the day. From this sum he was allowed sixpence for his own use, the rest being given to his mother, to help pay for his clothes. The little forlorn Esther had so far interested his feelings, that he generously proposed giving up this sixpence also, as some trifling help towards her support. And it was no small sacrifice for a boy who loved reading, and

was anxious to improve his mind, thus to give up the only means he possessed for obtaining paper and books, and attending an evening school. But what will not a generous, loving heart devise, especially if the individual who owns it is seeking to imitate Him who "pleased not himself," but whose whole life was one unbroken act of self-sacrifice! Oh, that there was more of the spirit of Jesus—the loving, tender Jesus—abroad in the world! How much happier it would be.

His mother hoped the noble offer of her boy would not be required.

It was some hours before George could sleep that night. His thoughts were busy with various plans for Esther's benefit. Among the foremost of these was his teaching her to write and cipher, and introducing her to the Sunday-school.

CHAPTER IV.

WEEPING AND WATCHING.

" I saw a young and gentle boy kneel by his mother's knee,
She gazed on him with looks so kind 'twas beautiful to see;
He breathed his little evening prayer in accents soft and free,
Oh! then I thought that little boy would surely happy be.

" But years went on, and then I saw him stand in manhood's pride,
And then a young and blooming wife was seated by his side;
He spoke to her with words so kind, her heart from care was free,
O then I thought that lovely wife would surely happy be.

" As years went on again I saw, but what a change was there,
His eye, that once beamed bright with love, had now a vacant stare;
Both time and guilt had furrowed deep his noble, manly brow,
Strong drink had done its fearful work, he was a drunkard now."

THE next day Mrs. Ashton, being busy with her washing, could not go out to make inquiries about Esther. Mary's temper had shown itself once or twice in hasty speeches to the little girl, who, in trying to make herself useful about the house, did not always do so in the best manner. "That's not the way to do it. How awkward you are, you little stupid. I wonder who brought'e up," were some of the unkind remarks made by Mary; while more than once she snatched the cloth from Esther's hand, and added, "I haven't patience with'e, you little fool." This was not in her mother's hearing, or she would herself have had a well-merited reproof. Then came the silent, pleading tears, and a "Please show me," which even Mary's sterner heart could not withstand; though we fear it was more the dread of her mother and brother's anger, should they find out her unkindness, that induced her to assume a gentler tone.

Mrs. Ashton bustled about to get through her work, and have the room "tidied up," as she called it, before her husband's return, knowing how much

depends on the comfort of a man's home to keep him there. He came in at the usual hour ; did not seem in the best of tempers ; said very little while taking his tea, and almost directly after left the house.

What made the industrious, patient wife look troubled as she took up her sewing, and sat down near the window? Children, some of you who may read this book can tell. You have mothers who, like Mary's, know what it is to weep and to watch through long weary hours of midnight darkness. When your eyes are sweetly sleeping, theirs are watching for the stumbling footstep of him whom it is your unhappy lot to call father. Oh! be kind, be gentle, be loving to that heavy-hearted mother, and, from the sad example before you, learn to hate the intoxicating cup, and strain every nerve to banish it altogether from our land.

They had not been sitting long at their work when George returned from his. It was a relief to see him enter, for poor Mrs. Ashton was so much cast down that she did not talk in her usual cheerful way, and the children found it rather dull. George was full of his new plans ; had bought a copy-book, and soon set about directing Esther how to put letters and small words together. Mary did not choose to

join them, as she had been for a short time at a day school, and still attended an evening one with her brother. She was too proud to learn of one only a few years older than herself; so there she sat, pouting and making herself miserable; thinking all manner of unkind things about her brother's love for the little friendless Esther, and wishing the day had never dawned that brought her to her father's door. Poor, selfish child! George's kind and patient manner worked wonders, and his tones so gentle, and so much in contrast to his sister's through the day, wrought upon the sensitive spirit of his pupil. One tear, and then another, and another, fell upon the book before her, till George, laying his hand upon her shoulder, said, "Hettie, dear, why do you cry?" This was enough. Down went the head upon the table, and a burst of loud weeping followed. Ah! kindness will move the heart to tears, as well as the roughest blast—especially if that heart has been little used to the softer influences of our nature.

Esther's rudely-formed couch soon became a resting-place for both body and spirit, and, in the arms of "balmy sleep," her cares and sorrows were again forgotten.

The evening was far advanced, when the anxious

mother's voice was heard—"Come, George, it is time to be off to bed." "Do let me stay a little longer. Father isn't home yet." A half-smothered sigh, and then—"You have to be up early, my boy. You must have rest." "And don't you need it too, dear mother? Do let me wait up for you, or with you." But the mother's, "No, my son," was spoken with a firmness that George could not mistake, and which he had been trained never to disobey. He quietly laid aside his books, gave his mother a hearty kiss in return for her fervent "God bless you," and retired into the inner room.

And there sat, hour after hour, the weary, broken-hearted wife and mother, listening to the silent ticking of the clock, till it struck the solemn hour of midnight. Wonder not that tears came to her relief—tears that she dared not shed before her children and her neighbours—that prayers were wrung from her heart, such as none but a drunkard's wife could pour out before a pitying God. As she sat there sorrowful and alone, the whole of her past life rose in review before her. Her early childhood, spent amid the sweet breath of green fields and flowery lanes, the village church and Sunday-school, in which she had been taught to read and love her Bible, and keep

God's holy day. Her first leaving home for service ; and then her gradual departure from the good way in which she had been brought up ; her first Sunday pleasure trip, and the guilt and shame she afterwards felt ; the forgetfulness of her vow, never to go again ; and her acquaintance with him she now called her husband. All, all came to her recollection as it had been but of yesterday's growth. Then, too, she remembered how, on several occasions previous to their marriage, Tom had been what is called a little elevated, and the wildness of his laugh still rung in her ears, though at that time it was deemed but an innocent and harmless way of making merry. Now, she felt it was an awful mockery of her young life's hopes. Oh, the years of creeping, torturing agony that had passed since then. Step by step had her husband's fatal habit been formed. Many and many a night had she sat as now—weeping and watching—till the heart that found no rest on earth had penitently turned to its God—that God of whom she had heard in the Sabbath-school, and in whose fatherly pity her soul now found its only resting-place.

While musing in this way, she was suddenly startled by a lumbering sound at the door, as if some-

thing heavy had fallen against it. Too well she knew the signal, and rose to let in her wretched, degraded husband. No word of reproach passed her lips, but a gently-spoken, "You're late to-night, Tom." This was denied in a storm of angry words mingled with oaths and curses, which his poor wife knew it would be useless at that time to notice.

In the midst of this outbreak, Esther's copy-book, which had been left open to dry, attracted his attention, and became a fresh cause of anger. Seizing it hastily, he tore it asunder, and swore that the little brat "shouldn't stay in his house another day."

A cup of coffee had been left simmering on the hob, which Mrs. Ashton, with a little persuasion, got him to drink, and then having become somewhat quieted, she assisted him to undress and to bed.

He soon sunk into a heavy slumber, but she, poor soul, had had enough to keep her wakeful the rest of the night.

CHAPTER V.

**FRIENDS, AND MORE OF ESTHER'S
HISTORY.**

**" Many sounds were sweet,
Most ravishing, and pleasant to the ear ;
But sweeter none than voice of faithful friend—
Friends given by God in mercy and in love.
My counsellors, my comforters, and guides ;
My joy in grief, my second grief in joy—
Companions of my young desires ; in doubt
My oracles, my wings in high pursuit."—POLLOCK.**

IN the calm twilight of a shady, pleasant room sat Ellen Seymour, the light and the blessing of her widowed uncle's home. She was not alone. Her friend, Alice Brent, was spending the evening with her, and having laid aside their work for awhile, the two girls sat conversing together on topics of mutual interest.

"That's an interesting looking girl the Ashton's brought with them on Sunday. I see she is put into your class."

"Yes," said Alice, "and she's a clever child. You'd be surprised to hear how well she answered the questions I put on their reading lesson."

"Perhaps she has been well brought up."

"No, indeed, I find her mother is a confirmed drunkard."

"You don't say so!" said Ellen in astonishment.

"Yes, 'tis too true. Asking Mary Ashton about her, I found she had become known to them in a very singular way."

"Do let me hear all about it."

"Well," said Alice, "I always make a point of calling on the parents of new comers, as soon as I can after their admission ; so accordingly I waited on Mrs. Ashton last Tuesday." And here Alice told her friend of the manner in which Esther was found by George, and his mother's visit the following day to Blossom's Court. She then went on to relate a little more of the child's history which Mrs. Ashton had gathered from a friend of the family, saying, "Mrs. Ashton tells me her father is in Australia. He was once in a respectable way of business, but his wife's drinking habits drove him nearly mad. His family was neglected, and in his absence his customers were so often insulted by his half-tipsy wife, that his trade began to decline, and he at last in despair, and to save himself from utter ruin, set sail to that far distant land. His wife's mother had been living with them, and in her care he left his wife and two infant children."

"Interrupting you," said Ellen, laying her hand on her friend's arm, "I believe I know something of the man. I distinctly recollect a circumstance of the kind occuring in my uncle's church. Wasn't he a baker in Portman Street?"

"I can't say, dear ; Mrs. Ashton only told me he

had been in good circumstances, but it is very likely to be the person you allude to.

"Oh, yes! it must be. He used to attend my uncle's ministry, and sometimes brought his wife with him; and I remember how much he was pitied, for they said he was a most patient, kind husband, and tried in every way to induce his wife to break off her evil habits. But she managed to get spirits secretly conveyed to her, and when intoxicated was often most violent in her behaviour. It must have happened five or six years ago."

"Yes, that was about the time I hear he quitted England. The baby he then left has long since been at rest. The grandmother was a kind protector to little Esther, and has evidently given her a good training; but she, too, died about six month ago, and since then it seems Mrs. Robins has been living in Blossom's Court, and, being without any restraint, has gone from bad to worse, till her neighbours consider her quite a nuisance, and are frequently alarmed for their own safety."

"Dear, dear!" said Ellen, "what a melancholy and shocking case. When will people be alive to all the horrors of this dreadful vice?" and she placed her hands over her eyes, not to shade the light, for that

was fast paling behind the curtains of the western sky, but to wipe softly and silently away the tear that moistened her eyelid, and came springing from her heart.

Both these girls could cite instances in their own family circles, of those who were either then living, or had fallen victims to this accursed sin. Alice had cousins who had been hurried to the grave through intemperance in the most awful and appalling manner ; while Ellen, whose father had held a high position in their native town, had been left an orphan at a tender age, and in destitute circumstances, through that father's yielding to the same sin. We wonder not that her father's brother, who had brought her up, should have become a stanch, or, as some would say, a "rabid" teetotaler, and that from her very childhood Ellen had imbibed the same principles.

"But what is the use of lamenting, and crying out against these evils," said Alice, "can't we do something to lessen them?"

"Yes, Alice, and we must."

"What can we do?" said her friend.

"We must have a 'Band of Hope,' for one thing, in connection with our Sabbath-school. This, you, know, we have long talked of."

As Ellen uttered these words a friend passed the window, whom there was just light enough to recognize as one of their most active teachers in the Sabbath-school. A tap at the window brought him in. When the first salutations were over, he was informed of the subject of their conversation, as well of Esther's melancholy history.

"Now something must be done," said Ellen, "we must at least have a 'Band of Hope,' and so endeavour to keep the children from such dangerous paths. Alice and I have often talked of it, but we want one of you gentlemen to take the lead."

"I can do nothing," said Mr. Liston, smiling, "I am no longer a teetotaler, though I wish you success with all my heart."

Alice inquired why he had returned to his former practices, for she knew he had been an abstainer for some time, though without taking any pledge.

"Oh," said he, "I was getting so weak, and Lucy (meaning his wife) thought I was growing thin, and I'm sure I've been much better ever since I have taken to porter again. I'm quite another man."

Ellen said very quietly, "Perhaps, Mr. Liston, there were some other reasons than water-drinking affected your health. I know that you were anxious

about a situation for instance, and had a great deal of extra fatigue just then. Come, now, be candid."

"Well, well," with one of his good-natured smiles, "there may be some truth in that, I'll allow. It's no use arguing against the ladies."

In the course of conversation it came out that Mr. Liston, who had lately become a commercial traveller, for a large and wealthy firm, had not the moral courage to resist the customs of the age. "Oh, it's impossible," said he, in reply to one of Ellen's remonstrances, "you must do as others do, or be laughed at, or treated with contempt, and be called a shabby fellow if you don't treat them now and then." And we believe this had to do also with his discarding teetotalism.

But is a principle worth anything if it cannot endure a little bantering and ridicule? Oh, how few true men there are in this pitiful world of shams. Boys, look well to it that you form good habits in early life, based upon the only standard of truth—the glorious, grand, old Bible—and then let earth and hell oppose, forsake them not, even to the death. This is the spirit we want to see in our rising youth. Who says, "It shall be found in me?"

Some further conversation followed, in which Mr.

Liston recommended the ladies to apply to Mr. Ford, another of the teachers, whom he knew to be a total abstainer, promising, at the same time, to do all in his power to aid their praiseworthy efforts.

"What a fine, hearty fellow he is," said Alice, after he had taken leave of them."

"That he is," replied Ellen, "but do you know I tremble for him in his present occupation. A young man of his lively, ardent temperament is exposed to great risks."

"So I think. He reminds me of what Mr. Gough said in one of his lectures, about some people never being likely to become drunkards, just from their naturally cold, unimpressible natures; while others, from the very opposite causes, have everything to fear."

"God keep him," was the fervent prayer of both hearts.

It was time for Alice to return home; but before leaving, Ellen inquired how the child, whose history had so much affected her, was now supported.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," said Alice. "A friend of Mr. Robins, from whom, indeed, Mrs. Ashton got most of the particulars which I have given you, has been in the habit of receiving remittances from him,

and giving them to his wife, according to his request, in weekly sums, lest she should spend it all at once. Hearing from Mr. Ashton the account of Esther's rescue, and knowing what the mother was, he urged her to keep the child, and has, of course, arranged to pay for its clothes and living. This has reconciled her husband to the child's being there, to which at first he was strongly opposed.

"That is very nice," said Ellen, "it must be a blessing to be taken from such a mother. I must call and see these people."

They entered Ellen's bedroom for Alice to put on her bonnet and mantle; but before leaving it, the two friends knelt together, and in a few simple, earnest words, commended to our Father the poor drunkard's child, and the objects which lay so near their hearts, of which they had been speaking.

And what work shall not prosper if it be only grounded in faith, and watered by prayer?

CHAPTER VI.

VISITS TO BLOSSOM'S COURT.

"We have seen the cruel demon of intemperance make a successful attack upon the holy citadel of a mother's love; and when we saw it effect such a conquest, we felt it possessed more than a giant's power to mar the happiness of man. We look upon her who was once a beautiful and most loving mother, and see a pale, hopeless, wandering drunkard; and as we follow that poor creature through a life of misery to a drunkard's grave, we pray that God may deliver the present and future generations from such a dreadful evil.—
J. INWARDS.

THE morning after Tom Ashton's drunken fit, already described, his wife sent Esther to a neighbour's house to be out of the way of his anger. But it was late in the day before he awoke from his heavy, unrefreshing sleep, and then in a sullen, discontented mood he slunk away to his work, half ashamed, and more than half angry with himself. He had some good qualities, and but for this ensnaring vice, might have been a blessing, instead of a curse to his wife and family.

In the afternoon, Mrs. Ashton went out to obtain, if possible, further information respecting Esther's friends; and hearing from the grocer with whom she dealt, that Mr. Robins (whose name he recollected) had a friend living near, she found her way to him, and there learnt the particulars which were detailed in the last chapter. She then went on to Blossom's Court, to inquire for the mother. Knocking at the door of the house she had previously visited, she was welcomed with a cordial, "How d'ye do, ma'am?"

"I'm come to ask after Mrs. Robins. How is she getting on?"

"Oh! her's been pretty quiet since you was here last. Will ye step in to see her?"

"Well, I thought perhaps I'd better, as I've made arrangements to take care of her little girl."

"Oh, then I'm glad to hear that," and so saying the good woman stepped forward and tapped at the next door. "Come in," said a hoarse, husky voice.

The room Mrs. Ashton entered bore evident marks of the owner's degraded character. Several articles of furniture were of a better order than are generally found in the dwellings of the poor—these spoke of former respectability—but all were in a wretchedly dirty and untidy condition. A strong smell of gin pervaded the apartment, while stretched on a ragged covered sofa, with a novel from a circulating library in her hand, was the poor deluded mistress of the house.

"I called, ma'am," said Mrs. Ashton in a respectful tone, "to tell you something about your little girl. I thought you'd like to hear of her."

"I don't want to hear anything about the little hussy. She chose to take herself off, and I'll take care she never darkens my door again."

Mrs. Ashton hesitated what more to say ; but had not to wait long, for again the husky voice broke silence—"Is that all you've got to say ? If so, you may go about your business, and tell Esther, her mother's curse is resting on her."

"Oh, ma'am, I cannot tell her that. I think of what she was when a little helpless baby. Didn't you love her then ?"

"There, don't preach to me, woman. Go, or I'll knock you down ;" and rising hastily from the sofa, she exhausted her passion in a violent slamming of the door, through which Mrs. Ashton had just time to make her escape.

Mrs. Ashton directed the civil, kind-hearted neighbour to send for her at any time, if occasion required, and begged her to do all in her power to save Mrs. Robins from the ruinous course she was pursuing.

"That I will," was the reply, "for indeed her is to be pitied."

With a heavy heart Mrs. Ashton took her way homeward, musing on the strange occurrences of the last few days, and wondering for what hidden purpose this drunkard's child had been committed to her care. She well knew nothing happened by chance.

Whether on account of the heavy rain that fell, or from the workings of conscience, it is pretty certain Ashton remained indoors the whole of that evening. George and Mary were gone to the writing school, and Mrs. Ashton had not dared to bring Esther back till she knew how her husband would take it.

The tea-things had been cleared away, and as the weather was still warm, notwithstanding the shower that was falling like dew upon the thirsty earth, she opened the window a little, and placing Tom's arm-chair near a small round table, on which lay his pipe, sat down by his side with her sewing.

"Well now, Tom, ain't this comfortable?"

"Ay, Jane," he replied, at the same time slowly drawing out a whiff from his pipe.

"Better than the public-house, now, isn't it?" said the wife, half fearing she had gone too far.

"Well, I don't know, Jane, 'tis rather dull."

"The children 'll be back soon (looking at the clock) and George has such a pretty book from the library, may be you'd like to hear un read a bit. And there's a sweet little piece they've learned at Sunday-school. You ain't heard 'um sing this good while."

In this way they chatted for some minutes, Tom

evidently getting into a better humour. By-and-bye he asked rather suddenly,—

“What have 'e done with—what's her name?”

“Esther,” said his wife, “oh, she's spending the day with Nelly Cole,”—for she did not like to tell him the more immediate cause of her absence.

“Well, have 'e made anything more out about her?”

This question gave Mrs. Ashton the opportunity of telling him all she had heard and done; and thankful enough did she feel when he said, “Ah! that alters the case altogether. If they'll pay for her keep, I'd as lief have the child here as not. She'll be a companion for Mary, at any rate.” She had been obliged in the course of her narrative to allude to the drunken habits of Esther's mother, and her violent behaviour, and had closely watched her husband's features the while. She fancied she saw the stirrings of conviction cross his brow; but of his inner thoughts she knew nothing.

Soon after this the children returned. George and Mary were sent to fetch Esther, and, before going to bed, they sung to their father the little piece called “Happy Land;” which he liked so much, as to ask for it a second time. His “Good night, child,” to little Esther, had something in it really tender.

The following Sabbath she went to school with George and Mary, and for some two or three weeks nothing very particular occurred. Her gentle, loving ways were winning all hearts. Mr. Ashton had been at home in the evening much oftner. His wife thought because, on more thn one occasion, Esther had thrown her arms round his neck, and said in her own silvery tones—"Please do stay at home to-night, and I'll sing to you." She had learnt from her grandmother, as well as at school, many very pretty hymns and pieces, and having a soft, bird-like voice, both her singing and reading were most attractive. Even Mary's jealous, passionate temper was feeling the influence of her patient and forgiving one; and Mrs. Ashton had no reason to regret that she had befriended the little outcast.

One night the family had gone to bed as usual; but before long were aroused by a loud knocking at the door. Mrs. Ashton threw a sheet over her shoulders, and went to inquire, "Who's there?"

"Oh!" said a voice she at once knew, "come over to Mrs. Robins, for the love of God. Her's in a dreadful way, sure enough."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh! her's got what 'um calls d'lirem tremens. I

thought I'd leave coming for 'e till the morning, but her screams and her talk be so shocking, Mrs. Collins and I couldn't bide it no longer."

While the woman was thus telling her tale Mrs. Ashton had been hastily slipping on a few articles of dress. Telling her husband to wake the children early, and giving a few directions about what they should do till her return; she set off once more to Blossoms's Court.

As they drew near the house shrieks of the most appalling kind were heard, and on entering the sick room Mrs. Ashton was quite startled at the ghastly, terror-stricken face before her. "Is't Hettie?" screamed the woman, as the door opened, "I'll go to her, I will," making an effort to rise in the bed, and the next moment sinking back exhausted, howling and screaming in the most horrifying manner. Then lifting the bedclothes to her face as if to hide from view some terrific object—"Oh, take it away! take it away!" and again, another and another shriek.

"Here," said Mrs. Ashton, coming to the side of the bed with a cloth dipped in vinegar in her hand, "let me bathe your poor aching head."

"Who are you? Oh! mother, mother, you ain't going to kill me. I'll never, never drink again.

Where's Hettie?" And then came a violent fit of weeping, which seemed for a time to quiet her, during which time Mrs. Ashton applied the vinegar to her head, and got her to take a composing draught which the doctor had left, as the only thing he could do for her. Towards morning she sank into a troubled sleep, disturbed by frequent starts and heavy moans. Mrs. Ashton now thought she might slip away for half-an-hour, and as the poor creature had been so constantly asking for her child, she determined to bring her back with her. It seemed cruel to deny her a sight of it, little good as it might do to either of them.

George had been up early, assisting to get the breakfast, and he and his father were by this time gone to their work. The girls were busy washing up the cups and saucers as Mrs. Ashton entered.

"How is my poor mother?" said Esther, running up to her; for she had been told the cause of Mrs. Ashton's absence.

"She is very, very ill, and wants to see you Esther; You'll go, won't you?"

"If you'll promise to let me come away again; I know I ought to love her, but I can't. Is it *very* naughty to feel so, Mrs. Ashton?"

"Your mother has done very little to make you love her, dear ; but for all that, you should pity her, and pray for her."

"I do, I do, dear Mrs. Ashton, every night and morning ; grandma' taught me to. Do you think God will hear me?"

"He *always* hears prayer, Esther, even from a little child."

While talking thus, Esther had been standing by Mrs. Ashton's chair, with her head leaning on her shoulder. A kiss was exchanged, and then Mrs. Ashton bade her be quick and put on her bonnet and cape, while she drank a cup of tea which Mary had poured out ; and they were not long in reaching Esther's former home.

"How is she now?" was the first inquiry. "Oh ! I think her's sinking fast. Her's awoked up once or twice, and looks very wild, and her's very restless, but much quieter like."

After gaining this information, Mrs. Ashton stepped softly into the room, taking by the hand the trembling, almost terrified child. A sob, and then a faint scream came from the sufferer. "Where's my Esther ? I'm dying, and they won't let me see her. No ; I won't die, I can't die yet."

"Mrs. Robins," said Mrs. Ashton in a half whisper, "here's your little girl."

"Where, where?" said the dying woman, with an eagerness they did not think she had strength to show. Esther came forward, and at Mrs. Ashton's bidding spoke to her—"Mother dear, I'm here, your own little Hettie."

"No, no—I—cursed her—a mother's curse." These words were murmured out in a broken, indistinct manner. Then there was a pause, during which, Mrs. Ashton whispered in her ear the name of Jesus, the dying sinner's friend; and, taking Esther's hand, she gently placed it in her mother's. This seemed to recal her wandering senses. She gave one long wistful gaze, and then said, "'Tis Hettie."

"Yes, mother."

"I thought you'd never come. I'm dying, Hettie. Be better than your mother—say you forgive her."

"Oh! mother, I do, I do with all my heart," at the same time bursting into a flood of tears, and pressing her lips on her mother's pallid cheek.

"Never — taste — a drop of gin — promise me that."

"I never, never will."

"And Hettie, your fa"—— but the sentence died upon her lips. Convulsive struggles came on, each one fainter and fainter, till at last the throbbing heart was still, and the spirit gone to its last account.

Poor Esther wept in agony for some hours, while her mother's friends were busy with necessary arrangements. It was a death-bed *she* was never likely to forget!

CHAPTER VII.

SABBATH EVENING TALK.

"Sweet is the light of Sabbath eve,
And soft the sunbeam lingering there ;
Those sacred hours this low earth leave,
Wafted on wings of praise and prayer.

"These moments of departing day,
When thought is calm and labours cease,
Are surely solemn times to pray,
To ask for pardon and for peace."—EDMESTON.

ESTHER had been taken to her mother's funeral by Mrs. Ashton, who, with the gentleman before mentioned, as a friend of the family, and the two neighbours who had nursed Mrs. Robins in her illness, were the only mourners. The Sabbath following she appeared at school in her neat black dress, which at once told its own tale to her kind-hearted teacher. Miss Brent took an opportunity of saying a few words to the little mourner, apart from the other scholars ; and they were words which touched the heart, for the tears again flowed, only in a more quiet, gentle manner than on the day of her mother's death.

The public duties of the day were over. To her great joy Mrs. Ashton had induced her husband to go with her that evening to hear Mr. Seymour preach. He had long neglected the house of God, only going once now and then, when the weather prevented him taking his country stroll, or a fit of goodness, as he called it, came over him. Generally

speaking, he rose later on the Sabbath morning, and would lounge about, reading the newspaper and smoking his pipe, till dinner time, after which a walk in the fields or park, or a boat on the river (for it was a sea-port town), would occupy the rest of the day. Some of his fellow-workmen, idle and godless as himself, with their wives or sweethearts, would frequently join him in these falsely termed "pleasure trips," and it seldom happened that they returned quite sober.

His wife had long ceased to go with him, but spent the day in trying to train up her children "in the way they should go."

Since the last fearful outbreak, he had only on one or two occasions been slightly intoxicated; and Mrs. Ashton was beginning to hope there was some prospect of amendment. The awful death of Mrs. Robins had also made him more thoughtful than usual, so it was nothing to be wondered at that he should consent to accompany his wife and family to their customary place of worship. The evenings were beginning to draw in, though it was still pleasant in the open air to a late hour. So, when they returned from service, the children took their stools and chairs into the court behind the house—

the only garden they could boast—and there sat chatting in the dusky light, till called in to supper. It had been given out in school, that some of the teachers were about to form a “Band of Hope;” and that all who would like to join it, or who wished to hear about its plans and intentions, would meet in the school-room on the following Wednesday evening at seven o’clock.

“Isn’t it nice that we’re going to have a ‘Band of Hope,’” said George. “I’m so glad. I shall join it: I’d like to be one of the first.”

“And I’m sure mother will let us. She said, when I told her about it, ‘By all means, Mary; I only wish every boy and girl in England belonged to one.’”

Ah! thought George, poor Mother has reason for wishing so; but he did not say it aloud.

“What does a ‘Band of Hope’ mean,” said Esther; “I don’t quite understand.”

“Why,” said George, “you’ve heard about Temperance Societies, I suppose, Hettie.”

“No,” said Esther, shaking her head.

“Well, dear, you know there are many people in the world that get drunk.”

“Oh, yes!”

George continuing—“They drink too much beer,

and wine, and spirits, and all that sort of stuff; and make themselves very foolish, and ruin their health, and bring their families into poverty and distress. Well, now, some good people, years ago, met together and tried to get up a plan for doing away with these wicked practices. And they called it a 'Teetotal Society,' because all who belong to it sign a pledge, that they will not take any of these intoxicating drinks."

"Well, that was very kind of these good people. I shall always love them for it. But, George, there's many don't belong to the—what-d'y-e-call-it society."

"Teetotal," suggested Mary.

"No," said George, "but there's numbers do. I can't tell how many in this town; and I've heard mother say, they've done a great deal for the poor drunkard. We know one case, don't we, Mary?"

"Oh, yes," said Mary, "Nelly Cole's father, you mean. Oh! he was one of the dreadfullest swearers you ever heard, and used to be most always drunk; but the Temperance missionary came round with tracts, and invited the people to their meetings at the Temperance Hall. And after going there once or twice, they got him to take the pledge, and ever since he's a bin such a nice man."

"Oh!" said Esther, laying her head gently down on George's shoulder, next whom she was sitting, "I wish poor mother had heard of this society; perhaps she'd a bin here now. I know she used to drink a deal of gin, and then she'd get so cross, I used to try to get out of her way. I didn't know so much about it till grandma died;" and the tears came rolling one after another down her cheeks. Mary wiped them away with the corner of her pinafore, while George, placing his arm round her waist, tried to comfort her.

"There, don't grieve any more, Hettie, you are with us now, and we all love you very dearly;" and to divert her thoughts, he said quite cheerfully, "I haven't told you yet what a 'Band of Hope' is."

"No," said Esther, very faintly.

"Well, it is just the same thing for children, that the Teetotal Society is for grown up people. So you see, if we determine when we're young never to use these drinks, and keep our pledge through life, there will be no fear of our ever becoming drunkards. Now, don't you think 'tis a good thing? And won't you join it?"

Esther looked up, with a smile breaking through her tears, like a gleam of sunshine from a heavy cloud, and with some degree of animation, said, "Oh!

yes, George ; 'twas what mother made me promise, never to touch gin ; and so I shall be doing as she bid me."

"And we mustn't forget," said George, "to ask God to help us keep our pledge."

They then talked over some of the events of the day—the reading-lesson and the address ; and Mary did not forget to pass her remarks upon some of her school-fellows' new bonnets and frocks. "What a fright this one was," and "how pretty that ;" and "how shabby Mary Symons looked ; I'd be ashamed to come out such a figure." But Mary did not know that her namesake's mother had a large family, and that her father spent most of his wages in the public-house. Perhaps, if she had, she would have been a little more charitable in her speech.

"You can't think how kindly Miss Brent spoke to me," said Esther.

"Isn't she a nice young lady ?" said Mary. "I thought you'd like her ; we all do. There isn't such another teacher in the school, except Miss Seymour."

"Oh ! we mustn't say so," replied Esther. "The others seem to be very nice young ladies, and I dare say their scholars are quite as fond of them as we are of ours. But I do love Miss Brent. She was kind to

me the very first Sunday I went, and to-day she talked to me so sweetly about mother's death, and said she hoped I should love Jesus, who had so kindly provided me a home, and that he would be my friend; for when he was going back to heaven he said to his disciples, 'I will not leave you orphans;' neither will he leave you, said she, for he loves little children."

George saw that the tears were just ready to start again, so he checked them by kissing her, and saying quickly, "'Tis very kind indeed of Miss Brent to talk so, and I hope you'll attend to all she says, like a good girl."

George felt towards Esther like a brother, and being three or four years older, took upon himself pretty much of the patron. He was just going to speak of his own teacher, Mr. Liston, but his mother's voice was heard calling them to supper, so they rose up and went in.

"Well, you've been having a long talk out there," said Mr. Ashton, as they sat round the table, eating their bread and cheese. "Yes, father," said George, and then told him what had been the subject of it, adding, "have you any objection to our joining?"

"Not I, my boy; I dare say 'tis a good thing .

enough." He did not like to admit too much ; but his poor wife felt quite happy to hear him say all that.

"I thought I should have heard 'e singing," said Mrs. Ashton.

"Oh ! we left that till we came in and had read our chapter," rejoined Mary. Her mother stole a glance at her husband to see how he took such a remark ; he did not look angry, at all events.

It had been their custom Sunday nights to read a chapter in the Bible from which the text had been taken, verse by verse ; and sometimes Mrs. Ashton added a few remarks upon the sermon, and offered up a short prayer with them. These were happy Sunday evenings ; but they were too often broken in upon by Ashton returning earlier than was expected, and then not in the best of humors.

This evening, however, he seemed willing they should go on in their usual way ; and he even joined in reading a verse when it came to his turn. The children then sung that beautiful hymn, "Saviour, breathe an evening blessing," to a very sweet, plaintive tune called "Beominster," after which they retired to rest.

Mrs. Ashton had not the nerve to pray before her

husband ; but she felt encouraged to hope that the day might come when he would take his own place in this duty.

As some of our readers may not know the sweet hymn referred to above, we will give it entire, and if they can get the tune also (Mr. Waite's "Hallelujah," part II.), so much the better. They are strikingly appropriate the one to the other.

"Saviour, breathe an evening blessing,
Ere repose our spirits seal ;
Sin and want we come confessing ;
Thou canst save, and thou canst heal.

"Though destruction walk around us,
Though the arrows past us fly ;
Angel guards from thee surround us ;
We are safe if thou art nigh.

"Though the night be dark and dreary,
Darkness cannot hide from thee ;
Thou art he who, never weary,
Watchest where thy people be.

"Should swift death this night o'ertake us,
And our couch become our tomb,
May the morn in heaven awake us,
Clad in bright and deathless bloom."

"Well, Jane, I don't know but this has been a happier Sunday evening than some I've spent,"

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said Tom Ashton, as they lay down to rest that night.

We need not tell you what Jane said or thought. It is enough to know that she thanked God with a full heart, and took courage.

CHAPTER VIII.
FORMING A "BAND OF HOPE."

" Our Bands of Hope—the glory of our land,
Like angels bright are sent by God in love,
To free the drunkard from drink's fatal brand,
And save our youth in danger's path who rove."

" Little drops make mighty oceans—
Little grains make mountains high—
Little hands may do brave service
To the world yet—come and try!"

WEDNESDAY came at last. A day to which many a little bright eye, at least in the town of D—— had looked with eager delight. It is astonishing how anything *new* will interest and please young people. But to the Ashton's and their little orphan friend, it was not the *novelty* of the engagement to which they looked forward that was the greatest charm ; to them it had a much deeper meaning.

Before leaving them in the morning, George charged the two girls to be quite ready by the time he came back ; and so with smiles and kisses, he bade them "good-bye," and ran off.

During the day, clouds began to gather, and, long before evening, the rain fell in torrents. "Oh ! dear, this is unfortunate," said Mrs. Ashton, "you won't be able to go, Esther, if it rains like this."

"What auntie"—she had begun to call her so, before her mother's death—"you don't mean," said Esther, in a vexed tone of voice, "that I mustn't go to-night !"

"Not if it rains like this, my dear. I'd be afraid of your taking cold. You have a slight cough already."

"But the rain wouldn't hurt me, if I put on my cloak and thick boots."

"I'm not quite so sure of that. You are not nearly so strong as George and Mary."

"That is provoking"—said the child, at the same time dashing to the ground a piece of work she held in her hand. Mrs. Ashton looked up in astonishment, for she had never seen anything like this temper in her before. She thought she saw, in the fire of her eye, and the scowl on her brow, something of her mother's passion, the day she had ordered her out of her house.

"Take up your work again, Esther," said Mrs. Ashton, very calmly. "I'm sorry to see so much ill temper."

After a minute or two's hesitation the child obeyed, but said nothing. Her pouting lips showed, however, that she was ill at ease. Mary, who had been in the bedroom, and only heard a part of what had occurred, looked as if she was rather pleased than otherwise, that the little "perfect one," as she had sometimes called her, was now at fault. We believe her better

feelings conquered in the course of the evening, and that she then felt really sorry for Esther's absence.

When George came home, he saw at once that something was amiss. He always looked for Esther's bright smile and warm welcome, next to his mother's. Now, she was quite silent, sitting near the window, and apparently sewing very fast—whether to keep her tears away, or her temper down, she let no one see, for her head was bent low over her work. His mother's uplifted finger, and whisper—"don't take any notice"—kept George silent, though he felt deeply pained that his little favourite should be in disgrace.

As they drew round the table to take their tea—for George had been let off a little earlier, and they had waited for him—Mary said, "Don't you think Hettie might go, mother?"

"Decidedly not. You see it rains faster than ever. I'm sorry for her disappointment; but it would be risking her health to go out in such weather. You know she's not as strong as either of you."

George now guessed the reason of Esther's clouded brow, and said, kindly, "Never mind, Hettie, we'll tell you all about it."

"But I wanted so much to go;" and the tears which had been struggling to get free for some hours, and her proud heart had kept back, now fell almost as fast and plentifully as the rain outside the house. Mary was soon suitably dressed for such a stormy night. As they went out, they stooped to kiss her, and George whispered, "Don't cry any more, dear Hettie, it makes me so unhappy."

Whether it was George's kind whisper, or her own better sense which prevailed, we will not say; but Esther soon after this dried up her tears, and sat quietly down to her work again, only a little sob now and then escaping from her bosom. As soon as Mrs. Ashton had cleared away the tea-things, she sat down too, and then taking Esther kindly by the hand, "My dear girl," she said, "you must learn to bear disappointment better than this. If you should live to be a woman, you'll find most every day worse things than this to bear. Besides, dear, you know the weather isn't ours to alter; and when we're angry because it stops our pleasure, it's like murmuring against God. Now, he knows what is best for us, and for all the world; don't you think so?"

Oh! yes; and I know he's so good to me, I ought never to be angry with anything he does.

But," continued Esther, "that wasn't all I cried about." And throwing her arms round Mrs. Ashton's neck, she said, "I know I have been very, very naughty; and yet you're so kind to me. Mother would have beaten me black and blue, and perhaps knocked me down; but you, dear Mrs. Ashton, are nothing but kindness. I can hardly bear it. Will you, O will you forgive me?"

Tears now filled Mrs. Ashton's eyes, as she folded her to her bosom, and sealed her forgiveness in a long, warm kiss. And she only wondered, that from the training Esther had had, there should be so much of proper feeling left. Much of this was, doubtless, owing to her good grandmother; while much that was wrong, could easily be traced to her poor unfortunate mother.

When George and Mary returned, Esther was surprised that the evening had appeared so short. Of course they were full of the meeting, and soon told Esther all that they could remember. But as our readers will perhaps like to hear all the particulars more fully than they could relate them, we will just go back a little, and enter the schoolroom with the young people at the time appointed.

Notwithstanding the heavy rain, a very large

number had assembled, and looked for the most part brimful of excitement and curiosity.

Mr. Ford was in the desk, and opened the meeting by a very short and suitable prayer. He then said a few words about the object they had in view in wishing them to form a "Band of Hope," and explained what it meant; and then asked them to join him in singing a temperance melody. The tune was known to most of them; and as they had provided a number of the little penny books, which he said, "would be lent them for that evening," they sung it off with a great deal of spirit.

Two or three strangers connected with the general Temperance Society in the town had been invited to assist. So one of them was next asked to say a few words. He expressed his joy at seeing so many present, and related the following affecting incident:—"A gentleman was once crossing a churchyard, and was met by a funeral. The only mourner was a female, who appeared greatly distressed. Asking one of the by-standers, who the person was about to be buried, the old man replied; 'Ah! sir, he was as fine a lad as ever lived. His mother was left a widow when he was only a few years old, and was one of the kindest creatures upon earth. She was

too kind to him—always let him have his own way—gave him plenty of money ; and before he was twenty, he had become the companion of some of the worst Sabbath-breakers in the place. Many and many a time has his poor mother sat up till midnight, when he has been brought home from the public-house by some of his drunken comrades. Lately he treated her most cruelly ; but she bore it, *like none but a mother could*. Last week, after drinking very hard, he had, for the third time, an attack of delirium tremens, and he died in an awful state.'

"Now, my boys," said the gentleman, "which of you would like to live such a life—to die such a death? Not one. I cannot think, cannot believe it. Then keep from the temptation by resolving at once never to taste the dangerous, the poisonous cup. In total abstinence there is safety, but not else."

The melody called, "The Crystal Spring," was then selected and sung, as being very suitable to follow the remarks of the last speaker.

Then another of the friends made a short speech, telling them, that a very pleasing instance had come under his notice, which should act as a stimulus to their efforts.

"I am glad to find," said he, "that so many of you

take up the 'Band of Hope Review.' A little girl, one of your own number, had unfortunately a drunken father. She took home this pretty, little paper, and got him to read it, or would sometimes read it to him herself, and the result has been most delightful. About two months ago, her father came to one of our temperance meetings, and took the pledge, saying, it was the reading of that paper that led him to think upon his evil habits, and made him resolve to forsake them. My friend has given you a story for boys—here is one for the girls—"Go, and do likewise."

Mr. Ford then gave out another temperance hymn, and when they had finished singing it, he said, "Well now, my dear young friends, haven't we spent a very happy evening!"

"Yes sir," resounded from all parts of the room.

"And you'd like to come again?"

"Yes sir," universally.

"Well then, you must *think* over, *talk* over, and *pray* over, what you have heard to-night; ask your parents if you may not sign the pledge, and then if we are spared to this night week, we'll hope to meet you again."

Many asked most eagerly, if they might not sign at once—foremost of whom were George and Mary

Ashton ; but it was thought better that they should have a little more time to consider, "for it must not be done hastily," said Mr. Ford, "we want you to keep it for LIFE. Before dismissing you," he went on to say, "I have another short speech to *read* you. It is from one of your kind teachers, who takes the deepest interest in your welfare, and I am sure you will listen to it with marked attention."

A profound silence prevailed while Mr. Ford read as follows :—

"MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,

"One of the first, fondest wishes of my heart has this night been realized. The sin of drunkenness is too appalling to think of, its evils too numerous to mention. To some of you, I fear to many, they must be familiar. Some of you have fathers who get drunk, and you know how wretched it makes your mother, uncomfortable your home, and how afraid, or disgusted you feel with your unhappy parent. Or what is worse still, some of you may have mothers who drink! Oh! horror of horrors! And once they were young and innocent of this vice as you may be. Think of that, and say, is there no danger of your following their example? Now we want to keep you

from the snare. And that is why we ask you to take the pledge.

"Yet one word more. Never, dear young friends, mistake temperance for religion. While we are anxious to keep you from the drunkard's curse, we are even more anxious to see you come to Christ. To him, then, devote your young heart's energies and ardent love, and then come, join heart and soul in this right glorious work, and see if the next generation shall not be better than the present.

"Your faithful friend,

"ELLEN SEYMOUR."

A few simple rules had been printed as the foundation of the society, and a copy of them, together with a nice little temperance tract, was placed in the hand of each, as they left the room. The benediction closed the proceedings of the evening.

And if George Ashton, felt a shade of disappointment, at his not being able to take the pledge that night, it was greatly lessened by the thought that perhaps Esther's name would now stand nearer to his own.

At their next meeting those who took the pledge had their names written on a very pretty card, prepared by the committee in London.

CHAPTER IX.
TEMPTATIONS AND STRUGGLES.

"Come, come away,
Pause not nor delay,
Fear the tempter's bait to try,
To our band for rescue fly,
Come, brothers, come.

"Come, come away,
Snares around thee lay,
Venture not the doubtful ground,
Cast thine anchor safe and sound,
Come, brother, come.

"Come, come away,
Lift thy heart and pray,
Pray for strength to keep thy vow,
Pray for aid to make it now,
Come, brother, come."

"WHAT makes Ashton look so grave, I wonder?"

"Can't tell. He's going to turn Methodist, may be." This speech was followed by a sneering laugh.

The speakers were two carpenters, engaged in fitting up a shop that was undergoing some alterations.

"I heard he was at a Temperance meeting t'other night, 'long wi' Ned Cole," said the first speaker.

"Ah!" said the other, in some astonishment, "I knows the time when he wouldn't go upon no consideration. For I've heard Ned ask un again and again."

"Ay, but I hear tell they've had a little girl with 'um the last five or six weeks, whose mother was a great drinker; and she died the other day of delirium tremens."

"Oh! that's of it, is it? So I suppose he thinks he'll be taken off in the same way."

"'Spose so." And the two thoughtless men joined in a mocking laugh.

"Well, he's a jolly good-natured fellow. Shan't like to lose his company, must say."

"He's not gone yet," said the other; and he begun to whistle as he hammered away at the shelves before him.

A little later in the day.—"I say Jim," said one of them, "ar'ee going to the circus to-night?"

"Well, I don' know. Perhaps I may."

"Let's get Ashton to go with us. He's fond of horsemanship, I know."

"So us will."

Their conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of the owner of the shop, who came to look after the workmen, and to show a friend who was with him the alterations he was making. As these were pointed out, the friend said, "Ah, yes; great improvement, certainly, You'll be ready for the goods, I suppose, in another week or two."

"Yes, I think so. But just step in with me"—going towards a door at the upper end of the shop—"I want to make some additions to the order I gave you the other day."

"By all means." And they entered a comfortably furnished parlour, and sat down to arrange their business.

Decanters of wine and spirits stood on the side-board. "You'll take a glass of wine with me," said the draper, as he rose to ring for glasses.

"Thank you," said Mr. Liston, for it was our old friend.

No great persuasion here—but it was the *custom* of society.

They got into a pleasant chat, partly on business, partly not. A couple of glasses of port had been sipped, and another was pressed upon Mr. Liston.

"No, thank you. I can't indeed. I never exceed two glasses"—gently keeping back the hand that was attempting to refill the empty glass.

"You're very moderate, 'pon my word."

"So one should be," said Mr. Liston, politely bowing and bidding his friend "good morning."

The whole transaction had been witnessed by Thomas Ashton, who was engaged in painting the outside of the house. We shall see what effect it had on him in the sequel.

As the men were leaving work in the evening, one of them said, "I say Ashton, we're going to the circus, by-and-bye; will'ee go?" The man hesitated, though he was particularly fond of this sort of

amusement. At last he said, though not very firmly, "No, I think not."

"Why, what's come to 'ee, Tom?" said another of the men, "there, don't make a fool of theesel', come along man."

"Oh, he's going to be mighty pious all at once, and get shute of us wild fellows at a stroke." And Jim lifted up his eyes in rude mockery, which made the rest burst out laughing.

Thomas Ashton, however, had unhappily not come to that decision, of which his companion derisively hinted. He was only "halting between two opinions" as yet, and could not well brave out their ridicule. Hence, Satan, our great enemy, took advantage of him.

The men saw that he wanted but a little more persuasion, so, when their laugh was over, one of them said, "Why, what harm is there in the circus, Tom?"

"Well, I don' know that there be much harm in it."

"Nor I, neither, so come along."

Having gained their point, arrangements for meeting each other were soon made, and the men separated to go to their different homes.

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"Well, I'm sorry you're going, too," said Mrs. Ashton, "for we've done up our work, and I thought, as 'twas a fine evening, as soon as George come, we'd have a nice walk all together."

But she didn't speak angrily—that good, patient wife of his; and her mild looks and gentle words went far into her husband's heart.

The circus party met according to appointment, and seemed thoroughly to enjoy the sport prepared for them.

Tom's seriousness had gradually worn off, and, as the wild and dangerous feats were gone through, his loud clapping of hands, and "Bravo, bravo," were as vociferous as any one's. Cans of beer were carried round by waiters amongst the heated spectators. "Ale, sir, ale?" There was no resisting the temptation. He and his companions drank pint after pint, at intervals, till, from the excitement and close air of the place, as well as the liquor, Ashton was soon "half-seas over," as they vulgarly express it.

And yet he had felt some qualms of conscience even there. Recent circumstances in his family circle, had made him, as we have seen, more thoughtful. A friend had persuaded him to attend a Temperance meeting, and while listening to the powerful

appeals, and vivid illustrations of the speakers—all of which he knew to be but too true—he had almost resolved never to taste another drop of intoxicating drink. But here he was, feeling hot and thirsty; hadn't he seen Mr. Liston, too, his own son's Sabbath school teacher, drinking wine to-day? There could be no great harm in a draught—just one. Thus his foolish heart reasoned; but one draught was not enough. Another, and another followed; till, by the time they left the circus, his evil companions had no difficulty in persuading him to go with them into the tavern close at hand, and finish out the day.

His poor wife—what will she say, when she sees him come staggering in once more, in the dead of night?

“Oh! Tom!” was every word she uttered, as she opened the door; but it was said in such a heart-breaking tone of voice, and accompanied by such a look of anguish, that drunken as he was he appeared to feel it, and, flinging himself into his arm-chair, he put his hands over his face and wept.

“I'll never do so again, wife, I never will.”

For a few moments, they wept together in silence, and then sinking on her knees, beside his chair, with her streaming eyes uplifted to heaven, his heart-

broken wife cried, "God of mercy, hear my poor husband's vow. Save, oh! save him from a drunkard's grave!"

Surely there was an "amen," to that woman's prayer; though it was known to God only.

* * * * *

Ashton rose with a heavy heart the next morning. His wife assumed all the cheerfulness she could, and seemed doubly attentive to his comfort. Esther's kiss, and Mary's "Will you be home to-night, father?" were answered firmly, "Yes dears, so be ready for a nice walk."

The "Good-bye" at the door, and "God bless you Jane," were never so precious since the hour, "long, long ago," that she had first consented to be his.

There is some hope now, thought she, as she turned with a brighter face to her household duties. Her text that morning was, "I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice, and my supplications."

His fellow workmen were not half so tormenting as he had feared and expected. They were less talkative than usual—perhaps from the sullenness and stupor which generally succeed hard drinking—and one of them had committed himself so far, as to be unable to attend to his work for the day.

Such are some of the pleasures of intoxication !
He soon gained courage to bear patiently their taunts and jeers, and found every resistance was an advance in the right direction.

All honour to the brave who fight manfully to do right, whether man or woman, girl or boy ! God speed them !

CHAPTER X.

**A CHURCHYARD SCENE, AND ITS
RESULTS.**

"Little they thought that the demon was there,
Blindly they drank, and were caught in the snare;
Then of that death-dealing bowl O beware.
Touch not the cup, touch it not."

"WHY, what's the matter, George? You're looking quite whisht."

"Oh! mother, haven't you heard what has happened?"

"What! where?" said his mother all in a breath; and, taking a mug from the dresser, she filled it with water, and handing it to him said, "Here dear, take a drink, 'twill revive 'ee a little. You seems frightened, sure enough."

"Oh! mother, 'tis enough to make me—there now, I feel a little better. Why, what d'ye think—this afternoon four or five boys—only boys, mother, were found in St. Luke's churchyard dead drunk; and, what's worse, they don't seem to think they'll get over it. Isn't it shocking?"

"'Tis indeed. D'ye know any of 'um? How was it found out?"

"Some man was passing through, and saw 'um all lying on the ground with an empty bottle by their side. It smelt of whisky, so he soon knew what was

the matter ; but none of 'um was sensible. Master was out, and came by there, just as they were carrying 'um away."

"Dear, dear, how awful!" and Mrs. Ashton felt again deeply thankful that her boy was not of the number.

Presently her husband came in. He, too, had heard the news ; and seemed equally shocked with themselves. He had gained the additional information, "that one of them was much older than the rest, a lad up fourteen years of age, called Parry ; that his father was a sailor, and that by some means or other, he had got hold of a bottle of whisky, and induced four little fellows, much younger than himself, to go with him to this churchyard, where they had sat upon the graves, and passed the bottle round till it was emptied of its contents." *

This dreadful occurrence formed a topic of conversation the whole of the evening. Many were the expressions of sympathy and pity which the girls, indeed, every member of the little group, expressed for the unhappy parents of these boys, as well as for the sufferers themselves. They little thought how

* A fact that occurred in Liverpool a few months ago.

near their own dwelling were some of those for whom they felt so much.

"This is a sad, but powerful argument for the teetotalers—especially for the 'Band of Hope' friends—said Mrs. Ashton."

"I was just thinking so," said George.

"Ah! 'tis for all of us," said the deep-toned voice of his father. "Jane, I'll never taste another drop of the accursed drink. I've been trying this week or more to do without it, and though I own it have cost me something to give it up, and I feel queer like without it—yet I see so much evil connected with it, that I've made up my mind at last to take the *pledge*. I'm afraid to go on without *that*; my resolutions have so often failed, and I think our friends, who do so much to try and reclaim us, ought to be encouraged."

He took them all by surprise. He had never said so much in the presence of his children before. Indeed, so carefully had his noble wife concealed from them his drinking habits, that it was only George who really knew of their existence. Mary might have suspected such a thing occasionally; but she was too young to take much notice; and Esther had certainly not the least idea that "Uncle Tom,"

as she sometimes playfully called him, had shared in her mother's guilt and shame.

"My dear, dear husband," was all Mrs. Ashton could get out. "Thank God!" and tears came to her relief, for her heart was full, even to bursting.

"Bless you, dear father!" was George's energetic exclamation; while the girls threw their arms round his neck, and playfully strove which should give him the first kiss.

And was there no bevy of angels, think you, looking down on this joyous scene, and tuning their harps afresh in adoring praise? Yea, verily, for there is a book which saith, "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth."

When composure was restored to this now happy family, and they sat comfortably eating their evening meal, a gentle tap was heard at the door.

"Who's here at this time of night, I wonder. George, dear, step and see."

"Oh! if you please," said a strange voice, "will you ask your mother to come over to Mrs. Cole's. Her's in dreadful trouble?"

"What? what's the matter?" said Mrs. Ashton, rising from her seat, and going towards the door.

"Haven't 'ee heard," said the stranger, "about the boys as was found at St. Luke's, this afternoon? Why, two of 'um be hern!"

"Never! Is it possible? D'ye hear that, Tom? Poor Mrs. Cole! Oh, dear! Oh, dear! But, how are they—living, I hope?"

"Yes, I believe 'um be. The doctor's a bin there for hours, and have only just left; and he thinks now they'll get over it. But you'll come to her, poor soul, won't 'ee?"

"Directly," and the stranger disappeared in an instant.

What a turn was again given to the current of their thoughts and feelings! So closely linked are some of earth's joys and sorrows.

It was a distracted house that Mrs. Ashton entered. The father was pacing the room in which the still unconscious lads were lying, in the greatest agitation. His wife, who had but just recovered from a strong fit of hysterics, was still sobbing, and crying violently, bolstered up on a sofa-bedstead, on which the boys generally slept; while she and her husband, with the girls, occupied the room above. A kind neighbour was standing by her side, bathing her temples, and trying to soothe and pacify her.

As she caught a glimpse of her friend, she exclaimed, "Oh! Mrs. Ashton, my poor boys! my poor boys!"

"They're sleeping now, they tell me, and are likely to do well."

"Would they had never been born."

"Oh! don't say so, my dear friend. Let us hope the worst is over."

"But such a disgrace. Everybody knows it"—and she shook her head mournfully, and rocked her weary body to and fro, as one is apt to do in trouble.

"But they were too young to know what would be the ill effects of their folly. and arn't so much to blame as that lad Parry."

"Perhaps not—yet they ought to have known better. They've had warning enough from their poor father afore now. He feels it dreadfully, and 'cuses hisself for all of it. He says if he'd only bin a sober man all his days, 't would never have happened."

"Well, it might, for all that."

"Oh! no, never; for they'd have been brought up different. You know what he's a bin till just lately; and then likely they'd have both bin members of one of them blessed 'Bands of Hope.' Oh! if they only gets over this, I hope their father will make um both take the pledge."

"I should think there'll be no difficulty in getting them to do so. If such an awful event as this in their lives doesn't urge them to it, I should say nothing would."

In this manner Mrs. Ashton had gradually talked her poor heart-stricken friend into something like composure. But there was little rest for either of them through that long, dismal night. Going backward and forward from room to room, and reporting the progress of the invalids hour by hour, was Mrs. Ashton's chief occupation. Towards morning she got a few minutes' sleep in an arm-chair by their bedside, having persuaded Mr. Cole to get some rest, that he might not be quite knocked-up for the next day.

"Where am I? What's bin the matter?" said the elder of the boys in a low voice, as he opened his languid eyes, and raising his head from the pillow, immediately fell back again, exclaiming, "Oh, my head, my head!" The younger lad still slept.

"You've been very ill," said Mrs. Ashton in a soft, kind way of her own. "Lie still now, like a good boy, and I'll bring 'ee a cup of warm tea; it will do 'ee good." He could not then be told of what had taken place.

The doctor paid an early visit, and pronounced

them out of danger, which was a great relief to their poor mother's heart. They were to be kept quiet, given a few nourishing things, such as beef tea, sago, or gruel, and in a day or two he hoped "all would be well."

Mrs. Ashton advised her friend to remain in bed a few hours, as she had passed such a miserable night, and was still feeling its ill effects in a distressing head-ache.

"But who'll watch my poor boys, and give 'um what they wants?" said the anxious mother. "Mary must be off to her work (she was apprenticed to a dressmaker), and Nelly's too little to do much."

"Would 'ee like for Esther to come in a bit?"

"Oh, that 'ud be just the thing if ye could spare her! I never seen such a purty behaved little girl. That day she spent with us Willie was quite taken with her."

So it was arranged that Esther should go over. And as soon as Mrs. Ashton had seen them all comfortably settled, and had with her own hand washed the faces of the little boys, and given them a draught which the doctor had left for them to take, this kind-hearted woman went back to attend to her own family affairs, and to despatch Esther in her stead.

CHAPTER XI.
ESTHER'S VISIT.

"God entrusts to all talents few or many,
None so young and small that they have not any ;
Though the great and wise have a greater number,
Yet my one I prize, and it must not slumber.

"God will surely ask, ere I enter heaven,
Have I done the task which to me was given.
Little drops of rain bring the springing flowers,
And I may attain much by little powers."

"Soft as snow upon the ground
Should our chidings fall around ;
Kindly, gently, should we speak ;
Human nature is but weak .
* * * Any wrong
Quick is told by every tongue ;
But a few, with fingers bright,
Point to noble acts and right."

* * *
"Gently chide—while chiding, cherish,
Human hearts, like flowers, may perish."

"SHALL I go at once?" said the little maiden, when Mrs. Ashton had told her what was required of her.

"Yes dear, and haven't you some nice book from the library to take with you? Perhaps they may like to hear you read a little story. But you mustn't let 'em talk much; mind that Hettie."

"Yes, auntie;" and off she darted, like the good little fairy which she certainly was.

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"Oh! Hettie, I feel so bad," said Willie, as she bent down to ask how he was? "I know, too, what's made me so—'twas all that nasty, horrid gin. What a fool I was to go with Joe Parry at all. He'll never catch me doing so again, I'll warrant."

"Hush, hush," said Esther, "you mustn't talk now, Willie. By-and-bye, when you're stronger, you can tell me all about it. Try and lie still now—do."

She then went round to the other side of the bed, and looked upon little Johnny, who was not quite

nine years old, his brother being two years older. He had been awake, but was now dozing again, so she stooped down and kissed his pale cheek. Then placing a chair near the foot of the bed, she opened her little basket and took out a small volume, saying, "Would you like me to read a bit, Willie?"

"Please."

It happened to be a book called the "Turning Point," and as Esther read clearly and distinctly several stories illustrating the title of the book—that is, showing by some very pleasing anecdotes, how a particular event in the life of various boys and girls had led to an alteration in their course of action—Willie became deeply interested.

"I'm afraid I tire you," said Esther, as one story after another was finished.

"Oh, no! pray go on; 'tis such a pretty book, and you read so nicely, I could listen for hours." At last she came to the end; and seeing him lie very still with his eyes closed, she took out her work, which she had also brought with her, and began sewing.

Johnny awoke, and complained of thirst, so she gave him a drink of toast-and-water that was prepared for their use. And all was still again for some time.

Meanwhile Mrs. Cole had risen, and come in to see the boys, and though still feeling very weak and ill, had managed to get ready a rice pudding for their family dinner.

In the afternoon, as Esther resumed her seat by the bed-side, and Mrs. Cole was gone to lie down again, as her head continued to ache very badly, Willie said to her, "Esther, you thought I was asleep just now, when you'd done reading?"

"Yes, Willie."

"I wasn't though. I was thinking this affair all over, and wondering whether it would be a turning point in my life."

"And I hope you prayed to God to make it so," said Esther very earnestly."

Willie was silent ; but his look seemed to say, he didn't know much about prayer.

"Don't you ever pray, Willie?"

"Yes ; I says the prayer mother teachd me, every night when I'm not too tired and sleepy."

"Oh ! Willie," Esther continued, "God will not hear such sort of prayers. I think, if you had asked Jesus with all your heart, yesterday morning, to keep you from sinning against him, you wouldn't have been lying here now. Teacher says, there is no real

prayer unless our *heart* is in it. Will you try to pray like that, Willie?"

"Yes, Hettie, I will. For O dear, what if I'd died last night! what would have become of me?"

"Perhaps God has spared your life, that you may grow up to be a good, useful man. I dare say you'll never forget what has happened."

"I'm sure I never shall, as long as I live. Nor Johnny either."

Esther was afraid he had already talked too much, as he began to look rather flushed and excited, so she said,

"Now, Willie, you must lie still, and think a bit, or, perhaps, go off to sleep, while I go down and see how your mother is, and put the kettle on for tea."

What a thoughtful little girl Esther is! Why haven't we many such?

By this time Mrs. Cole felt a good deal better, and in a little while she and Esther got the tea ready, and, as the boys seemed to wish it, they carried the tray upstairs, that they might have tea all together, the mother declaring, "It was more cheerful like," and Esther and the boys, "so nice."

They were much too weak to sit up without

support, especially little John ; but Esther, like any old woman, placed the pillows at their backs, putting a little stool and the large family Bible behind, to keep them up.

"Oh! mother," said Johnny, "isn't father very angry with us? D'ye think he'll beat us when we 'um well again?"

"He is very, very sorry, Johnny, that you should have been so naughty. Of that you may be sure ; but I believe he thinks you've had punishment enough already in the pain and sickness you've brought upon yourselves."

"Oh, mother, we'll never do the like again," said the boys both together ; and then Johnny, child-like, began to throw the blame on his elder brother, and both of them upon Parry, who had enticed them away.

"You mustn't blame any one but yourselves, my dear boys," said their mother. "It's true your father has not always set you the best example."

"He often used to give me beer," said Johnny, interrupting her ; "and laugh when it made me giddy, and I rolled about on the floor."

"Ah!" said his mother with a sigh, "but no one knows better than you and your brother do, and as I

was going to say, how deeply he grieves over it now. It almost broke his heart last night to see you brought in, in such a state."

"I'll be a very different boy I hope, mother, from this time," said Willie.

He had been thinking again about the "turning point" in his life, and, we will hope, praying about it too, according to Esther's definition of the word.

"And I'll be a good boy, too," chimed in little John, "if you and father will only forgive us this once."

"I have forgiven you," said their mother, giving them each a kiss; and if she had only known as much of her Bible and her God as Esther did, she would have added, "but you must seek God's forgiveness, too."

"They must join our 'Band of Hope,' mustn't they?" said Esther, while her little earnest face was lit up with a smile of heaven's own sending, to think that two more would be rescued from at least this one form of iniquity.

Our "Band of Hope." How sweet it sounded! The lads thought so as they both eagerly declared their intention of joining it; and Willie said, "Ah! we talked of going to the meeting last week; but

Frank Needham persuaded us to go fishing instead.

I wonder how Frank is?"

"Was he with you yesterday?"

"Yes, mother."

"Anybody else?"

"Only another boy, that I don't know, along with Parry. He called 'un Jack."

"Where does Needham live?"

"In Crown Street."

"I must get your father to call and ask after him. And I hope," continued his mother, "you'll be more careful in the future what company you keep. How did 'ee get to know Parry?"

"He used to come to our school; but he's left a good while ago, and I've only seen 'un once or twice since. . Don't you remember Needham, Esther? He was with us that evening we first seen you down in Green Pond's Lane, and you was a crying so."

"Was he?" said Esther. "I don't recollect any one but George Ashton who was so kind to me, and one other rude boy, who said something about my having no tongue, because I didn't speak; but my tears wouldn't let me;" and the tears were almost ready to flow again, at the bare recollection of that sorrowful night.

"That's the very one," said Willie ; " and, do you know, ever since that evening George has scarcely ever spoken to him ; and Frank calls him proud. I know which is the best boy though : there are not many boys like George Ashton."

Soon after this long talk George's knock was heard at the door. He had come to see if Esther was ready to go home. His mother had sent a kind message to Mrs. Cole, "hoping she was better, and that Esther would bring a good account of her two sons."

Mrs. Cole expected her husband home every minute, so she would not detain them ; and with many thanks to the valuable little nurse, she took her leave of the two friends.

George had never been through the streets alone with Esther, since the memorable night he first brought her to his mother's door. I dare say he felt a degree of pride now ; though not in the sense Frank Needham meant. What say you ?

Little girls ! seek to make yourselves beloved, by being kind, and gentle, and useful in the world.

* * * * *

The next day Mr. Ashton brought home the news that "Joe Parry had died in the course of the morning from apoplexy brought on by this fit of excessive

drinking ;" and that the other boys, as well as the two Coles, were slowly recovering.

At their next "Band of Hope" between twenty and thirty new signatures were taken, the first of which were William Cole and John Edward Cole. Their father brought them to see it done, and made a short speech on the occasion, telling the young folks present, out of a full heart, how much he had himself suffered from drunkenness, and what a blessing he had found in Teetotalism.

"Oh!" said he, "I never can thank God enough for the Temperance Society; 'tis the only hope for the drunkard. Thank God for them as first formed it. Cleave to your 'Band of Hope,' my dear young friends, next to your Bible. I don't know as much of that as I ought; but I mean to read it now. And if ever you're tempted to break your pledge, tthink of my poor boys and hold on firm."

His plain, honest words went home to many hearts, and there were few dry eyes in the place. They separated that night resolved to be more active than ever in the cause to which they had pledged themselves.

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

"Home! all charms around thee turning,
Bind us to the sacred spot;
Earliest scene of fond remembrance,
And the last to be forgot.
Pole-star of the wandering stranger,
Wheresoe'er his footsteps roam,
Turns his heart with strong attraction,
To the blessed light of home!"

EVER since arrangements had been made for Esther's remaining with the Ashtons she had been attending a day-school in the neighbourhood. It was not of a first-rate character, for the money her father sent home was not sufficient to pay for anything beyond a very plain education.

And now, as Mr. Ashton had fairly given up his drinking habits, his wife found, to her great delight, that she could afford to place Mary with her. This was much better than her merely going to the evening writing-school.

Indeed, Ashton's temperance had benefitted them in many ways. His master, finding him more steady and constant at his work, had inquired into the cause, and was so much pleased that he advanced his wages and made him a sort of foreman.

This enabled them to rent a small four-roomed house, instead of the two rooms they had been obliged to put up with before. One of the bedrooms they divided, Ashton himself managing to put up a partition; so the girls had one little bedroom and

George the other, in lieu of the shut-up bedstead in the dark closet, where he formerly slept.

Then there was a small parlor beside the kitchen ; and though it could not boast a carpet, and had only a small painted table in the centre, and a few cane-bottomed chairs placed round the walls, yet, to this now happy family, it was a perfect paradise. The window was adorned with some pretty geraniums too, which George had brought home one evening and put there secretly, as a little surprise to his mother on her birthday, the next morning—the purchase of some of his hoarded sixpences. We question if our beloved Queen was ever more happy in any of her splendid banqueting halls than were the heroes of our tale on the first Sabbath evening they took tea together in this cosy little parlor of No. 3, Melborne Place.

Now these are some of the *lesser* blessings of Temperance, and surely not to be despised. When would Thomas Ashton have had such comforts around him, had he continued the drunkard ? In all probability he would have gone to far greater lengths, his family have been beggared and, possibly, brought to the workhouse, as thousands have been. Tremble, then, dear children, to take the FIRST draught ; you know not where it may lead.

But we have wandered from Esther and her school-days, of which we want to tell you a little—so we must return.

George continued to assist her in getting up her evening lessons, and even Mary often condescended, under Esther's influence, to share his help, particularly in writing out her exercises. Now we all know that school-life presents many features peculiar to itself. Young people of various dispositions, ages, and conditions in life, are here brought together, and, not unfrequently, petty jealousies arise amongst them.

Such was the case in the school which Esther and Mary attended. Sometimes their lessons appeared very difficult, or their sums very puzzling, and many small trials of temper took place from these causes; but although Esther would occasionally be off her guard (for she was only a little girl, after all), it was frequently Mary's remark, as they were undressing for the night, "I don't know how it is, Hettie, you're always so good and patient. You never get cross, as I do."

It was on one of these occasions that Esther, clasping the neck of her friend, and imprinting a kiss on her cheek, said, with great emotion, "No, dear Mary, you mustn't speak like that. Indeed, I often

feel very irritable, and, I fear, very angry too. Oh, dear, I'm far from being like our gentle, loving Saviour," and she burst into tears.

"Why, Esther, dear, what *is* the matter? Something has troubled you?"

"Oh! Mary, I've been trying to keep it in all day; but I feel as if my very heart would break." When her agitation was somewhat calmed, she said, "Did you notice how cool the Mertons and Sarah Jones have been to me of late?"

"Yes, and I thought they were very rude to-day at class, not letting you use their atlas, and pretending to be afraid to come near you. But you don't mean to say, Esther, you're grieving about them nasty, disagreeable girls. I never liked 'um."

"Oh, Mary, that is not all. I could bear that, and much more; but to be taunted with being 'a drunkard's child,' oh, Mary, Mary, 'tis more than I can bear; and yet, 'tis a disgrace that will cling to me through life." And again she burst into an agony of weeping, saying, "Oh! my mother, would that you had spared me this bitter sorrow."

Mary tried to comfort her as well as she could; but it was some time before her tortured spirit could be pacified.

"It will not always be known, dear Esther ; if you live to grow up, people will have forgotten all about it by that time, so don't cry any more." She might have added Jesus, the great friend of publicans and sinners will not despise you on that account, and his love is of more value than all the world's beside. But Mary knew, as yet, but little of that wondrous love—certainly, much less than the sorrowing friend beside her.

The next day, George took an opportunity of inquiring into the cause of Esther's sorrow, for its audible expressions had not been concealed by the thin partition of their bedrooms. Finding it had been occasioned by the cruel taunts of her unfeeling schoolfellows, upon discovering who her mother was, and what the manner of her death, he very kindly sympathized with her, and, at the same time, endeavoured to advise her how to act, so as to silence and shame them.

"I'd be civil to them, but nothing more," said he ; "and if an opportunity occurs of doing them a kindness, show that you are actuated by a better spirit. Depend upon it, Esther, 'tis best to win by love ; and in doing so, we are following the example of him who bade us love our enemies, do good to them :

that hate us, and pray for those that despitefully use us."

Esther thought so too, and thanking George for his kindness, determined upon taking his advice.

As the winter months drew on, she began to show symptoms of declining health, not sufficient, however, to create alarm. She would sometimes complain of headache, or a slight pain in the side ; but much oftener of great weariness.

Soon after the Christmas holidays commenced, Miss Brent, her Sabbath-school teacher, and Miss Seymour, arranged to leave home for a short time, having taken lodgings in a quiet, secluded village. Knowing Esther's delicacy, they thought it would be a pleasant change for her, and one that might do her good ; so they proposed taking her with them, in the capacity of a little waiting maid. Esther was delighted with the thought. To be so near such dear, good friends, was more than her young spirit could ever have anticipated. Sundry preparations were made with the greatest glee, and at last the day arrived for them to set off.

Mr. Ashton and George parted from her in the morning, as they went to their daily toil. "You won't forget us, Hettie," was George's last word,

accompanied by a look which told how much he should miss her merry laugh, and bird-like voice.

Later in the day his mother and sister, having assisted her to pack up a few articles of dress, witnessed her departure in the train, with her kind friends and benefactors. The evening seemed dull and cheerless without her. Not till then did the Ashton family know how the bright, sunny influence of this little child, had worked its way through every avenue of their nature. In one heart especially was her absence painfully felt. Was it meant to prepare him for a yet deeper shadow, that was even now looming in the distance?

Cold as the weather was, those short-lived Christmas days passed, as she had expected, very happily. Esther made herself useful in domestic matters, with the direction and help of her friends, while the evenings were mostly spent in the snug little parlor, with their books and work, and enlivened by instructive conversation, and sometimes a little singing.

The young ladies made themselves useful in the village, in taking round tracts, and Esther did not forget to put in a word for the poor drunkard. How could she ever lose sight of his claims upon the benevolent and tender-hearted? Accordingly, many

striking tracts, such as the "Fool's Pence," "The Wedding Night," "Drunkard's Bible," with many others of a similar character, were sent adrift, to do their silent, unpretending work, amid the poor deluded victims of intemperance.

Ah! bright and happy day that witnessed her return!

"We'll have tea in the parlor to-night," said Mrs. Ashton. "I dare say Esther 'll be home by six o'clock, for Mr. Seymour said the train would be in between four and five."

"Yes, mother, and I'd better light the fire there soon, to warm the room a-bit. I dare say she'll be cold enough after sitting still so long."

George came in soon after, having begged an hour or two's earlier leave. He had in his hand a small paper parcel. It was a plum cake, intended as a little welcome to the expected one—the barter of another sixpence.

This was the second happiest of happy evenings spent in that veritable parlor. And yet there was a shadow amid the brightness, even there and then.

"Don't you think Esther looks rather pale?"

"Oh! I dare say she is tired to-night."

"I don't like her cough though, mother."

“Well, dear, I don’t think ’tis worse than it was some time back.”

This did not satisfy the inquirer. *He*, at least, thought anxiously about her long after the rest of the family had sunk to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

NEWS FROM ABROAD.

"Far, far from his childhood's home,
The land of his mother's smile,
Where the crested billows' foam
Encircles the favored isle.
Alone on a foreign strand,
With a stranger's heart of care,
Fond thoughts of his fatherland
Inspire the emigrant's prayer.

"He has left his native soil,
And sailed o'er the wind-rocked sea,
In a stranger-land to toll,
For a strong brave heart has he.
But O, there are moments given
To kindred, country, home,
And benisons craved from heaven,
On the loved, where'er he roam."

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RATHER more than six months had now passed since Esther had been so strangely introduced into the family now living at Melborne Place. As the spring advanced her health seemed to improve, and once more all was tranquillity and hope around her. To add to the happiness of those sunny days, there came one morning a quick rap, tap, at the door. Esther flew to answer the knock, and, behold, the long-expected letter was put into her hands.

It was the first letter she had ever received from her father, and it was not surprising that her heart should flutter with excitement as she tremblingly broke the seal and read as follows :—

“ Adelaide, Nov. 25th, 18—.

“ MY BELOVED CHILD,

“ From my good friend, Mr. Hardy, I have received intelligence of your poor mother’s death, and also of the kind friends you have met with. This latter information has been a great relief to me ; for,

at the distance we are apart, I should not well have known what course to pursue. I had previously directed Mr. Hardy to place you at school, and his last letter tells me this has been done ; so now, my dear Esther, I trust you will be very diligent and attentive to your studies, and never forget to pray that you may grow up an intelligent, useful, and pious woman—a comfort to your father, and a blessing to the world.

“By the time you get this letter you will have passed your tenth birthday, which, I suppose you know, is on the 6th of January ; and as I hear you are a steady, thoughtful little girl, I think it now right to give you some particulars respecting your poor, unhappy mother. Harrowing as it is to my own feelings, I trust it may have a beneficial effect on yours, by leading you to abhor and dread the very slightest indulgence in those accursed drinks which led to her downfall and ruin.

“When I first knew your mother, Esther, she was a lovely, interesting girl, the life and joy of a large circle of friends. Pleasing in appearance, affectionate in disposition, and of the most attractive manners, she soon won my regard ; and I thought myself the happiest of men when I found the attachment was

reciprocated. Alas, could I but have foreseen what was to follow! She had great taste in singing, and possessing a good voice, was often invited to exert it in the little parties and pic-nic gatherings in which we sometimes mingled. It was on an occasion of this sort that I first made a discovery which has cast its deep, dark shadow around the whole of my subsequent life. Our repast had been spread beneath some shady trees, and, after thoroughly enjoying it, wine was handed round, a "toast" proposed, and some singing introduced. Several of the party sang, and your mother among the rest; and, whether from the excitement of the scene around her, or the wine she had drank, she certainly never sang better. Being myself a moderate drinker, it did not strike me as anything remarkable that she had taken two or three glasses of wine, in addition to the porter drank during dinner; and, although her spirits were more than usually excited during the rest of the day, I saw in it nothing to awaken suspicion, or render me uneasy. Who could have supposed that a young, amiable girl like her, would ever become—I shudder to write the word—a drunkard? Oh! if any one had even ventured to whisper a cautionary alarm, I should have spurned the idea with the greatest indignation.

“A few weeks more and we were married, and for some time all went on well. It is true, I sometimes joked her about liking her glass of port, and her becoming quite “a toper;” but never seriously meant either the one or the other. Nothing could be happier than our early marriage days, and up to a short time after your brother’s birth. This brother you never knew. He was taken off when only a few months old, and she appeared to feel his loss acutely. I now more frequently begged her to take a little wine, or a glass of spirit and water, believing it would do her good, and cheer her up. Alas! what a fatal mistake.

“But I need not distress you, my dear child, by further details. It is enough to say, that from that time, those habits were gradually formed, which afterwards became so confirmed and so terrific. When made conscious of them, I myself became a teetotaler, and banished all intoxicating drinks from the house; but it was of no avail. She managed to purchase and to conceal the poison she now so freely drank, and took every opportunity of indulging her evil propensity. Would that I could draw a veil over the succeeding years, or blot them for ever from my memory and heart. But no; there they stand,

in strong and bitter contrast to the happy days which ushered in their dawn. In a few years my business begun to decline. I saw nothing but ruin staring me in the face; and being without that support and comfort at *home* which I most needed, I at last determined to seek to retrieve my fortunes in this far distant land. Some, perhaps, have blamed me for leaving my poor, miserable wife under such circumstances. You, my Esther, my darling child, are, it may be, still too young to appreciate my motives; and certainly, can never know the agitation and distress it cost me. The sequel you know better perhaps than I do; and from the accounts which have reached me, I have great reason to bless God, that this mournful page in your young life's history, has been so productive of good. I need not, I am sure I need not urge you to adhere most stedfastly to your temperance pledge. Let nothing in earth or hell wean you from it. I use strong language, my child, for I have been a sufferer; and there is nothing like that to make one feel deeply and everlastingly in earnest.

"Some persons may tempt you, as you grow older, by saying, 'What necessity is there for a *young lady* to join such a society? It is very well for the poor

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drunkard.' I myself used such language once. But oh ! Esther, your own heart will be able to supply the readiest, sturdiest answer. You are now the only hope of your disconsolate father. And you will not disappoint him, will you ?

"And now I must hasten to other matters, for the ship, by which this letter will go, sails early in the morning. In a few years more I hope to arrange for your coming out. In the meantime, I trust you will make the best use of your advantages. Get all the knowledge you can, and above all, that which is highest and best, the love and fear of God. I should say much more on this point did time permit, and were I not aware that you have, in your kind friend Mrs. Ashton, and in your Sabbath school teachers, those who will give you the best advice.

"Write me regularly, and let me know, month by month, that my Esther remains a pledged teetotaler. Oh ! that I could clasp her at this moment to my heart.

"I have directed Mr. Hardy to let you have three pounds ('tis all I can spare just now), that you may make some useful and acceptable present to the friends who have so kindly found you a home ; and likewise purchase some little thing for yourself, as a

birthday present from me. Give the Ashtons, also, your father's hearty thanks and benediction.

"You will do well, dear Esther, to preserve this letter. The perusal of it may do you good another day. And now, my child, farewell. Heaven's blessing rest upon and encircle you.

"It is the one life-breathing prayer of your affectionate father,

"JAMES ROBINS."

Poor, dear Esther; how many times she had to lay down the letter, and wipe her tear-filled eyes during its perusal. She had gone to her little bedroom to read it alone, and when she came to the end, she sunk on her knees, and once again renewed her teetotal vow in the silent presence of her God.

Her father's present was quickly, and oh, how gladly, devoted to the purchase of a carpet for the little sitting-room, and some other trifling adornments, together with a neat muslin frock for Mary, and a cap and necktie for George. Articles of dress she knew they wanted. And never was little girl so proud and happy, as when she saw these tokens of her grateful love for the first time exhibited.

A few weeks after, she addressed the following reply to her father's letter :—

“Melborne Place, March 2nd.

“MY DEAR FATHER,

“I was so very, very glad to have your nice long letter ; and yet it made me cry a good deal. It is very kind of you to tell me so much about my poor dear mother, and I do hope I shall make you much happier than she did. I hardly remember you, dear father, I was such a very little girl when you went away ; but I just recollect your giving Charley and me ever so many kisses, and I saw tears in your eyes when you said, ‘God bless you, my darling Esther ;’ I have not forgotten *that*, father. And then grandmamma used to talk to me about you, and especially after Charley's death ; she said, ‘I was now your only comfort, and that I must try and be a good girl, and then Jesus would love me and take care of me.

“Dear grandmamma ! I was never happy after she died, up to that dreadful night I ran away from mother. I sometimes think her words have indeed come true ; for is it not God who has found me so many kind friends ? You don't know how good and

kind the Ashtons are to me, and dear Miss Brent and Miss Seymour too. I love them all so very, very much. But I love you too, my own dear father ; and now I know how much you must have suffered, I will do all I can to cheer and comfort you. But Jesus is the best comforter after all, is he not, father ? One thing, dear teacher says, he came into the world for was 'to comfort all that mourn ;' and I am sure he has often comforted me, for I always feel so much happier if any little thing troubles me, and I go and ask him to comfort me. And he will do the same for you ; I know he will.

"And now I must give you a thousand thanks, dear father, for the money you so kindly sent me. It was the very thing I most wished for ; for you must know Uncle and Aunt Ashton, as I call them, have a nice little parlor in their new house, but they could not afford to buy a carpet for it ; so I asked Mrs. Hardy's advice, and she very kindly laid out the money for me, and now there is a pretty carpet on the floor, and some neat ornaments on the mantel-piece, which make the room look quite beautiful. Miss Brent has kindly bought me a Reference Bible, and written in my name, and under it these words :—

“ ‘ A birthday gift from her absent and much loved father.’

“ My birthday was just before your letter came ; but the day after the carpet was finished, and put down, we kept it up. And, perhaps, you would like to hear something about it. We had tea together in the parlor, and dear, kind Miss Brent, and Miss Seymour, sent me a cake, and some oranges, and two little books besides. Mr. Ashton gave me a small work-box, and auntie put in it a needle-book and pincushion of her own making, and Mary placed a book-mark in my Bible of her own work, and George gave me a new hymn-book. So now don't you think I ought to be a very good and grateful little girl?

“ Miss Brent called in the course of the evening to see how we were getting on, and she joined in our play, and made us feel—oh ! so happy. I only wish you could have seen how happy we were.

“ Mr. Hardy will tell you all other sorts of news, father, better than I can. But I must not forget what you wish me so solemnly to keep in remembrance. I never, never can forget my temperance pledge, dear father, while my poor mother's history, and her awful death, have a place in my memory.

And ever since I joined our 'Band of Hope,' I have daily prayed that 'God would pity the poor drunkard, and make me of some use in seeking to reclaim him.' This was not quite my own thought though, dear father. Mr. Ford told us we ought to pray something like this.

"This is a long letter for me to write, dear father. I hope it will please you. George Ashton has been kind enough to look over and correct it for me, for I first wrote it on a slate.

"Here are plenty of kisses for you, my dear, dear father, and I hope some day to give you them all myself. So no more at this time, from

"Your affectionate little daughter

"ESTHER."

CHAPTER XIV.

ESTHER'S LAST SLEEP.

" Oh! grieve not for her with the wildness of sorrow,
As those who in hopeless despondency weep,
From God's holy word consolation we borrow
For souls who in Jesus confidently sleep.

" There is an hour of peaceful rest
To mourning wanderers given ;
There is a tear for souls distressed,
A balm for every wounded breast—
'Tis found above—in heaven."

THE warm, soft blush of summer spread itself over the face of nature, and all things rejoiced in its brilliant hue. Again the fields were dappled with the starry daisy—the banks and hedge-rows enamelled with the primrose and violet; while the hushed, cool breath of evening, invited the weary worker abroad into its freshness.

The recurrence of the season brought back to recollection the lane of a year-old memory; and Esther revisited it, endeavouring to recal the impressions then made, as well as to review the various events that had been linked in a manner with its history.

George and Mary were her companions, for she could not have found it out alone. "Here is the very spot," said George, pointing out a green knoll by the way-side.

"Let us sit down a-bit," said Esther, "I feel rather tired."

"Tired already?—why, Esther, you can't be well."

"Oh! yes, I am," she rejoined in a cheerful tone; and, after a brief pause, added, "This may be the last time we shall all be here together."

"What do you mean, dear?" said Mary, half doubtingly.

"Oh! nothing very particular, only father talks of my going out to him, and we may be parted in other ways, too, don't you know?"

There was a silence of some few seconds; each had thoughts of their own; but none uttered them. Nevertheless, Esther's scarcely hinted supposition, proved but too true. It was the last and only time the three were ever together in that memorable spot.

Verging on the autumn their "Band of Hope" festival took place, in celebration of its first anniversary. The excitement and fatigue of that gloriously happy day, and it may be a slight cold taken after the heat of running and sporting about in the farm-house field, left its ill effects on Esther's delicate frame. From that period her health began rapidly to decline.

Yet not till the cold blasts of winter came, did the friends who loved her so well, imagine there was anything serious in her complaint. Then it could no

longer be concealed. Her race was nearly run. Her sun was "going down while it was yet day." All that love and friendship could devise was done; but the Reaper had gone forth, and the Lord of Paradise had need of this tender and lovely blossom.

Who can describe the agony that wrings the heart, when first made conscious of an approaching separation from any one it deeply loves? To all but the immediate sufferer the thought was well-nigh insupportable. She was the calmest of the whole; and would often say, in the sweetest, softest tones, "Oh! don't grieve for me. I'm only going home a little while before you—won't you soon follow me? Isn't it better to be with Jesus?" And while their faces were bathed in tears, hers would be radiant with angelic smiles.

* * * * *

It was a calm Sabbath afternoon—cold, yet clear, for the crisp snow lay on the ground, and the glittering icicles hung pendant from the window frame. Near to the fire-place of the little sitting room, in which a bright, cheerful fire was blazing, sat, half reclining in an easy chair, the patient sufferer. On the table stood a group of spring's earliest, loveliest flowrets, the modest snow-drop; and

one could not but be struck with the beautiful comparison they furnished to the drooping invalid—at once so fragile and so fair.

“You will promise me, dear Uncle Tom?”—said the dying girl.

“What, my child?” said he, inquiringly.

“To become a Christian. Oh! I shall die so much happier if you will.”

“How can I, Esther?” and the big, round tear found its way from the stricken heart of the sturdy man.

“Only say that you will pray earnestly to Jesus to make you one. Oh! I must have you all with me in heaven. Dear Auntie and George were in the way before me, and Mary, I know, has set out, and you won’t be the only one left behind, now will you?” and she said this in the most pleading tone she could command, at the same time taking his large, rough hand and placing it in her tiny and wasted one, and raising it to her lips.

He gently withdrew it, and placing his elbows on the table before him, and shading his face with both hands, wept like a child.

“Only say the word, dear uncle, and I’ll be content.”

"Oh ! Esther," he at length sobbed out, "I'll do anything to please you."

"Not to please me only ; but our dear Saviour, who died upon the cross for our sins. Don't you love him ?"

"Not as I should do, Esther. Oh ! no, I'm afraid not."

"Then you'll ask him to make you feel his love more and more from this time, won't you, uncle ? See how much he has done for you, even since I've known you (he understood her allusion) ; but 't isn't enough to be temperate and sober, uncle ; Christ must live in our hearts, and everything must be done from love to him."

"Is this what you mean by being a Christian ?"

"Yes, uncle. Will you try to be one ?"

A few moments' silence, and then came a trembling and yet distinct utterance, "By the help of God, I will."

The strong man was conquered by a little child. Perhaps, we should rather say by grace, coming through the *influence* of a little child ; for the Holy Spirit does not disdain even such feeble instrumentality.

This affecting interview had been longed for and solicited by Esther, and now she seemed to feel as if her earthly work were done ; yet not quite all. The evening waned, and as its close drew nigh some of her Sabbath-school friends entered the dying chamber. Exhausted by the afternoon's effort, she had been carried up stairs somewhat earlier than usual, and was now lying on her bed, panting for breath.

"Dear Esther," said her teacher, bending over her, "is there anything more you wish to have said or done?"

"Only tell them"—meaning her schoelfellows—"that I die happy—that they must give their hearts to Jesus now, and be sure to meet me in heaven." And then seeing Miss Seymour on the other side of the bed, she cast her dying eyes upon her, and said, "Our dear 'Band of Hope,' tell them to be faithful to their pledge, even down to death."

Dying charges, who has not felt their solemn weight?

The whole of the sorrowing family remained watching around her through that mournful night, and at intervals there came, amid the gaspings and gurglings of the failing breath, such words as these—

"Heaven,"—"Home,"—"Jesus," and then all was still.

Towards morning she faintly whispered, "Dear father, I'd like to have seen him once more."

"You'll meet him in heaven, dear," said Mrs. Ashton.

A bright, placid smile, passed over her features, as she joyfully exclaimed, "Oh, yes!"

"Any message to him?" said George, as well as his choking tears would permit.

"My dying love, and last pledge." A while after, she whispered, "George;" and putting her hand on her Bible, which always lay beside her, "This is for you. Keep it for my sake."

Another painful gasp, and then a murmured, "Precious Saviour." One gentle sigh, and the spirit was at rest. She had passed into her last sleep. Her soul was with its God.

Words cannot describe the desolation of the bereaved household. The hush of the darkened chamber, broken only by the sobs and bitter weeping of the mourners. The tearing asunder of hopes and affections, all centering in that sleeping dust. These things *belong* to earth, and are, alas! too common to need description, even had we the required ability.

In all *heart*-experiences, "silence is more eloquent than sound." Who has not found it so?

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And so her young life ended—the life of that drunkard's child. A life marked by no very great events, and yet eloquent in powerful teaching. For, is there nothing *great* in example? Depend upon it, not even a little child treads the vale of life *alone*.

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In the events interwoven with Esther's history (which are mostly taken from life), we have seen some of the ruinous effects of drunkenness—that monster evil of our land—and have endeavoured, dear young friends, to enlist your sympathy and help against its encroaching power. Shall we plead in vain?



